UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

A Principal's Story of School

BY

S. J. McKenzie-Robblee ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

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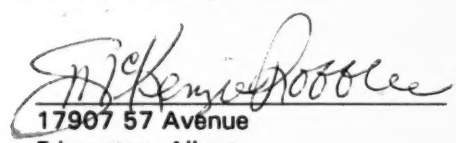

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **A Principal's Story of School** submitted by **S. J. McKenzie-Robblee** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

D. J. Clandinin, Supervisor

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W. Maynes

July 18, 1997
Date

Dedication

To the Children, Staff and Parents of
Bisset School.

Thank you for your love, support,
encouragement and stories.

To Lorna MacPhersen (nee Bisset) and
Blair MacPherson ('Granpa Mac').

Thank you for sharing your family
stories, especially those of your father,
Judge Bisset, with all of us.

Abstract

In this narrative inquiry I reflect on, and explore, my experiences as Principal at Bisset School and uncover narrative threads that weave together the story of how this one school came to be all that it was for me and for the other people involved in the story. I use a dance metaphor to explore the themes of moral imagination, improvisation, community and storytelling in my position as principal and in my story to live by. I reflect on my own learning and ways of knowing that shaped, and were shaped by, the unfolding narrative of Bisset School.

When I first became involved in the story of Bisset School, in the spring of 1989, I imagined possibilities for what might be created in a school as a place for children—a common space where children, as learners, could define their worlds, make contributions to those worlds and begin to imagine new worlds. I had the opportunity to create a school from the beginning. I wished to transform my imaginings for a place called school into Bisset School. This is my story. This is a story of Bisset School and the people who touched my life.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank the many people who have contributed to my work.

Dr. D. Jean Clandinin, my advisor, who created a caring place and helped me to find a space where I could learn, write and dance. Her encouragement and our many conversations have touched my life.

My committee for the conversations and thoughtful response which added flow to my dance.

My family and friends, whose love and support provide an unheard rhythm for my dancing.

Neil, for his love, patience and confidence in me.

Jimmy who helped me to recognize what is really important in schools.

The Bisset Staff, for joining in the dance and creating a place that honors and celebrates children. Our work together helped me to understand the magic of a learning community.

The Children at Bisset School, who touched my soul, sharing their stories of trust, love, imagination and hope.

Judy, Sandy, Monica, Peggy and Kent for listening, reading and sharing stories from their hearts.

Pam and Janice for joining my dance and encouraging my unfolding images.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

1. My Story Begins...The Overture for the Dance 1

Introduction 1

The Chameleon 2

Reflections 10

My Research Begins 16

Telling My Bisset Story 17

Jimmy's Story 19

Retelling My Bisset Story 28

My Narrative Inquiry 30

Ethical Considerations 31

Children of the World Are We 32

2. Moral Imagination...An Image for the Dance 34

I Have Been Wondering 34

The White Rabbit 37

Bisset Buddies 40

Rhythms 46

Assemblies 48

Dance Notation...The Markers 52

Portfolios...An Image of Belief 56

3. Improvisation...The Dance Unfolds 59
It is a Time in Which 59
Tone of the Dance 60
I Love to Come to School 60
Reflections 63
Go Spread Your Wings 68
Improvisation as an Art Form 71
Journal Writing 72
Faith, Trust, Responsibility 74
The Salamander Room 76
Story Writing 78
Science Worlds 79

4. The Dance Company...Learning About Community 84
I'm the One in Charge of Celebrations 84
What is Really Important in Schools? 87
Relationships 90
Trust 90
The Milkman 94
Company of Dancers 96
Memories to Keep 97
Remember When...? 99
They Stopped in a Good Place 103
My Teacher Understood 108

5. The Narrator...Telling the Story of the Dance 113
The Dawning of Day 113
A Storyteller 119
A School Home 124
The First Meeting 128
November 11th 135
That's Just What We Do! 138
One Cold Winter's Day 141
A Recess Story 142
The Spirit of Stories 146
It's Like a Smile 146
Crow and Weasel 150
Beginning a New Day 153

6. Bibliography 157

MY STORY BEGINS...THE OVERTURE FOR THE DANCE

Introduction

As I prepare to write this story, I wonder about who I am...I am a dancer who listens and draws images for my dancing from the heartbeat of life. I am a mother who feels and draws strength for my own way of being from this same heartbeat. I am a principal who sees and draws meaning for my relationships guided by the rhythmic pulsing of this beat. I am a learner who experiences and draws wisdom from within the heartbeat of life. I am myself. With flowing motions I weave the movements of the dancer, the knowing of the mother, the understanding of the principal, and the discovery of the learner together to compose my stories of school. I am held within the heartbeat of life itself.

". . . Stories attach us to others and to our histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place, character, and even advice on what we might do with our lives. The story fabric offers us images, myths, and our metaphors that are morally resonant and contribute both to our knowing and our being" (Witherell and Noddings, 1991, p. 1). The story of Bisset School is the story of a living tapestry alive with the threads of imagination, improvisation, community and storytelling. All of these threads are woven together with other finely textured threads representing the people, the time and a place, telling

their stories through the metaphor of dance.

Dancing for me is the "dance which is like the very heartbeats of universal life" (Ambrose, 1955, p. 1).

> Dancing is something more than one of the arts—basically it is one of the instincts...to become a great composer you study how to handle an orchestra, the various instruments, musical notation and the works of the great composers who have gone before you. To become a great painter you must study perspective, anatomy and architecture. A poet must have a mastery of his language, an impeccable sense of rhythm and great visionary gifts. To become a great dancer you must have all of these qualities (Ambrose, 1955, p. 1).

These qualities too are needed as I write about and make sense of the complexities inherent in the life of a school and in all of the people who shaped and were shaped by the very unfolding of the dance. I am held within the very heartbeat of life itself.

The Chameleon

There are pieces to this story that I have not thought about for a long time. Some stories seem to come unbidden and from nowhere, but do they really? One beautiful fall evening as I was driving to the University I noticed and admired the setting sun, the pink and purple clouds complementing the darkening blue sky. It was breathtaking and I felt a part of it, as if I was in tune with the movements of the world as this day gracefully acknowledged the oncoming night. As these thoughts

were flowing through my soul, another image floated to the surface of my mind, it was a memory from long, long ago. What triggered the memory I'm not exactly sure, but I'd been reading Mary Catherine Bateson's book *Peripheral Visions* (1994). I'd also been thinking about the many experiences I've had in my life and how they're all related, and connected like a dance, to the way in which I now see the world. The image that came to my mind was of a statue, probably soapstone, of a little green chameleon. And with that image, came my story of the chameleon.

I was very excited. We were to have a special, somewhat mysterious visitor staying with us for a couple of days. My seven-year-old mind was busy conjuring up all sorts of stories to explain and to accompany the few facts that I actually knew. The visitor was my Great Aunt Enid who, I had been told, was on her way to Vancouver from Africa. She was coming to spend a couple of days with us on route to a conference in Vancouver. My Dad was especially happy. He told me that he had not seen Aunt Enid since he was a young man. Africa, jungles, lions, giraffes, and Zulu warriors, were all images that began filling my thoughts. I asked my Dad, "Why haven't you seen Aunt Enid for so long? Why is she in Africa? Where is Africa? Where is her husband? Does she have a pet... maybe a lion cub? Dad, what's a Great Aunt?" My father patiently and in his gentle voice tried to answer all of my questions. I think that finally I was told that I would just have to wait and see and that I would get a

chance to ask Aunt Enid, my many questions.

The day arrived. I desperately wanted to go to the airport with Dad, but my older brothers got to go instead, just because they wanted to see the airplanes! I was not especially happy that I had to stay home and help Mom get everything ready for Aunt Enid. The idea that her magic might only be for the first person that set eyes on her was of grave concern to me. The idea of magic was something that I just couldn't get out of my mind. I couldn't explain all of the notions that I had about Africa. The most logical explanation, to a bright-eyed little girl who loved stories, was that Africa had to be a magical world filled with wondrous things. Aunt Enid was the key to this magical kingdom. Mom, with her practical wisdom, knew that I needed to have something meaningful to do, so she got me busy "decorating" the bedroom that Aunt Enid was going to call home for this short visit. I remember picking Spring flowers, getting into a "fight" with Laurie, my sister, because she wouldn't let me use the crayons and drawing pictures of what I imagined Africa to be like including one very large picture of the airplane with Aunt Enid on it waving "Good Bye" to her African animals. Laurie and I were just about to give up hope that we would ever hear the car in the driveway, when the slam of the car door and Rob's excited voice saying "We're home!" caused my heart to pound. Now that the moment had arrived, I was suddenly

apprehensive and shy. I ran to the living room and hid to one side of the couch hoping that I wouldn't be noticed right away. I could hear Laurie's voice as she introduced herself and showed Aunt Enid her teddy bear.

"Where are the other two girls?" spoke a deep quiet voice. I was trying to fade into the corner and wondered how I could postpone the meeting that I had been so looking forward to. Now that Aunt Enid had arrived I felt a little foolish for some of my imaginings.

"Kathy is still sleeping, but she will be awake soon. We had better enjoy the peace and quiet while we have it, because Kathy keeps everyone busy when she is awake and on the go," laughed my Mom. My youngest sister Kathy was two at the time, and she certainly had a mind of her own when it came time to do what she wanted to do! "I don't know where Sue is. She was here just a minute ago waiting anxiously for everyone to arrive home. I don't know where she could have disappeared to."

Rob and Al took Aunt Enid's suitcase and her soft-sided carpetbag into the bedroom as everyone else made their way to the living room. As I heard the footsteps coming closer, I took a deep breath and slowly stood up squashing myself into the corner. My first glimpse of Aunt Enid was astonishing and one that I vividly remember to this day. She was not at all what I had

expected...although, who really knows what it was that I had expected! Aunt Enid was stunning, not in a beautiful way, but in a unique way.

She was extremely tall, especially from the perspective of a small seven-year-old child, and wearing a loosely fitting cotton print dress. Her frame was gaunt, the blue and yellow dress and dusty brown sweater just hung there as if nothing was holding them on to her body. Her brown weather-beaten face was smiling as our eyes touched for a moment. I paused briefly enjoying the flicker of recognition, and then my eyes continued traveling upwards to the halo of curly pure white hair framing her face. My stories of magic were coming true! I felt that Aunt Enid must be 100 years old and very wise. She was, however, only 55 years old, but she was indeed wise. Rob and Al had returned from the bedroom and Kathy was calling from her crib. Laurie was playing with the dog and I could hear Mom and Dad making introductions from a million miles away. It was as if, for that moment, time had stood still. I was completely oblivious of the turmoil around me, my eyes never left Aunt Enid's face. Aunt Enid sat down on the couch and beckoned me to her. She asked me if I liked stories and as I quietly nodded my head she patted the space on the cushion next to her. "Come and sit beside me and I'll tell you some stories about my work in Africa." Aunt Enid was a missionary in Africa. She had spent most of

her adult life there, helping the people of the smallest villages in whatever ways that she could.

I don't remember all the stories that we shared, but I do remember three of them. The first two came from two little books that she had brought with her to leave with us. These books I remember because, sitting beside my aunt, I had noticed that they were the same length as her long slim brown hands when she turned the pages while she was reading. The titles were A Little Lion and This is Africa. I still have both of those stories in a box of children's books tucked away in the basement. I loved the pictures, as they let me see a different world than the world with which I was familiar. I had lots of questions that my Aunt patiently answered, usually with another story. The third story, the one I am remembering now, didn't come from a book. It was one that Aunt Enid made up to explain her work and her world to a little seven-year-old girl who had a love for stories.

In the African jungle, on the side closest to the Savannah, lives a small chameleon. She was a small magical creature who worked very hard. She was quite quiet and extremely shy and because of this, and the nature of her hard work, the other animals of the jungle didn't always know when she was near by. Not wanting to disturb the animals, the chameleon often chose the quiet places where the dappled sunlight filtered through the

leaves to sit and think. She knew that when the other animals did need her she would be ready and close at hand. The chameleon, although not very pretty to look at herself, had the magical ability to change her skin and to blend right into the surroundings of a new world. Not only could she change her skin, but she could also "become", for a short time, the animal whose skin she had adopted. When this happens the chameleon could see the world through the eyes of her new skin. She never lost her skin, like her friend the snake did, so she was able to connect and weave the impressions of her new world with those experiences already living in her soul. This was invaluable when the animals were trying to solve problems or deciding how they might help one another. Seeing the world of the lion helped her understand the problems of being so loud...roarrrr! The lion certainly let his voice be heard but he was also very brave and daring. Seeing the world of the giraffe made it perfectly clear the difficulties with being so very tall and having your head in the clouds. The giraffe though also had a wonderful and beautiful picture of the larger situation. Seeing the world of the monkeys, Chameleon knew that even though they were very mischievous they were also very curious and willing to try new things. The turtle was slow, but steady and always got things done thoroughly even though he was always behind on the conversations. The rabbits loved the children very

much and always made sure that they were not forgotten. Sometimes the rabbits did forget which day it was and what they were supposed to be doing at any given moment. They did have such fun and were always were bubbling with laughter, so much so, that they forgot what they were laughing about. The chameleon just had to smile to remember what it felt like to laugh until the tears ran down your cheeks and to recall the warmth of holding a little bunny in your arms as he snuggled close. The chameleon saw her important work as keeping things moving smoothly towards the vision that was seen by all the animals when she put all of their different ways of seeing together inside of her heart. She gave voice to all of the possibilities from the imaginations of her friends in the jungle, on the close side of the Savannah.

Aunt Enid, after telling me this story, asked if I knew what a chameleon looked like. I shook my blonde head, no. "Come along with me then. I have something to show you." I followed this gracious lady to her bedroom, decorated with my pictures. She rummaged around in her tapestry carpetbag and found her figure of a little green chameleon. "Here, hold her for awhile", she smiled. My small hand tentatively reached out and touched the cool slim brown hand, as Aunt Enid reverently placed the heroine of her story in my waiting hand. It felt heavy and important as I gazed at the unfamiliar creature.

The two of us were inseparable for the two days that she spent with our family. We both told stories and I listened, with the wide-eyed rapture of the young, to her voice giving vivid pictures to my imagination through her stories and her company. She had touched my life in ways that perhaps I am just coming to recognize as I remember the magical little chameleon.

This was to be the first of only two meetings that I was to have with this remarkable lady. Aunt Enid, in such a short period of time, was to instill in my experience the necessity for seeing someone else's world, through their eyes, as a way of understanding the world itself. I remember my Dad sharing with me some of the frustrations that Aunt Enid felt when it seemed she was the only advocate that the villagers had. We shared many letters, cards and postcards over the years, but the second time I was to see Aunt Enid was at my Grandmother's funeral.

This was some twenty years after the Chameleon story and it was as if time had not passed. I was carried back to that first meeting, the touching of our eyes and the halo of white curly hair. Aunt Enid looked exactly the same. She beckoned to me and we found a quiet corner to continue the conversation that we had begun so many years before. She still carried the chameleon with her and, over the years, its ugly form had not changed except from the countless times that her fingers had

caressed the impenetrable soapstone for comfort, direction, faith and hope. She felt it was so important to see the problems with the eyes of the people she was helping. This was her hope for the future. This hope shone in her eyes, and was the only recognition that she was truly serving others and had touched the lives of many whom had walked the path with her. This was her life's work...helping to create possibilities for the people who meant so much to her...the children of Africa.

This little chameleon and all the memories that it evokes came back into my life for a third time. I was given Aunt Enid's talisman as per her wishes after her death. It took three years for her sister, also one of my great aunts, to settle Aunt Enid's affairs. This was not because Aunt Enid had a great deal of material wealth that needed to be distributed, in fact, she had very little, some might say, to show for her life's work. I knew that she had given her "sight" and her heart to the people she cared about and the returns were immeasurable. Aunt Isabelle, because of ailing health herself, found the task of settling the estate to be a small one and one that might wait for an easier time. Eventually this chameleon found its way to my Dad who passed it on to me with the message that Aunt Enid thought that I would like this ugly little chameleon.

I do. It is a reminder of a gracious lady who had the magical ability to keep others in her heart, to see and know the

world from their eyes and with the integrity and wisdom gained she imagined a better world. The chameleon always knew the "right" thing to do. Perhaps my fingers may continue to caress this little figure that holds the possibilities for the future in her heart. One day I will tell, my son, Jimmy the story of the chameleon and maybe, one day, it will become a part of his story too.

Reflections

As I reflect on this story as a part of my narrative knowing there are several threads and many questions that become apparent for me. "The process of spiraling through memory to weave connection out of incident is basic to learning" (Bateson, 1994, p. 11). As Bateson suggests there are patterns and connections, in my stories, as I lay side by side experiences that I remember as a young girl, a teacher, a mother and a school principal. These patterns, like movements in a dance, are ones that shape who I am. It is through these connections that I view and make sense of the world around me and compose my dance so that others may also know me.

The Chameleon story holds a metaphor that, perhaps, has been a part of who I am since my childhood. ". . . the visions of childhood could be treasured as alternative ways of seeing" (Bateson, 1994, p. 45). I love stories and have always had

stories to share or tell for as long as I can remember. As a young girl, stories were a way that I constructed meaning from new and uncertain experiences. "Each person is calibrated by experience, almost like a measuring instrument for difference, so discomfort is informative and offers a starting point for new understanding" (Bateson, 1994, p. 17). Stories were a way that I was able to create meaning from my past learning and 'knowledge' in order to make new connections and understandings. I listened to stories as my way of imagining the possibilities for new worlds, yet unexplored, and for bridging the multiple layers of meaning: past, present, and future. I told stories to my sister and friends about these imaginings, creating new characters, story-lines, places and settings. Aunt Enid's story about Africa breathed life into my incomplete, magical, and imagined world of a place called Africa. She gave meaning to my excited participation in her world through story. I saw familiar things in a new way, because of what I knew and the possibilities I could imagine. I improvised to make meaning from a situation that I only partially understood so that I could be connected in my knowing with Aunt Enid's world. "Human beings construct meaning as spiders make webs" (Bateson, 1994, p. 52). As my frame of reference expanded, I reached out to make more connections from my past experience towards new understanding and meaning in the present. This became

yet another new connection to my world of imagined possibilities linking future learnings and experiences.

Bateson (1994) also writes about the idea of improvisation as a mode of participation and observation in the present. "Participation precedes learning" (p. 41). For a dancer, improvisation is a way of exploring new worlds from the images held within your being as the dance slowly takes shape from this discovery and continued exploration. "Because it is not possible to stand aside from participation until we know what we are doing, it is essential to find styles of acting that accept ambiguity and allow for learning along the way" (Bateson, 1994, p. 235). Story telling and dancing gave me a "new and more fluid way to imagine the future" (Bateson, 1989, p. 8). Waiting until I had all of the information I might have needed to enter into Aunt Enid's world would have left me without a way to enter that world at all. Bateson believes improvisation may also have the possibility for recycling the past, the flashes of insight that come from going over old memories, especially of events that are ambiguous or unclear at the time which may hold more meaning when the memory is triggered by an experience in the present. My memory of Aunt Enid and the little chameleon has more meaning for me now as I reflect on that story for the second or even the third time. "Spiral learning moves through complexity with partial understanding, allowing for later returns. What we

call the familiar is built up in layers to a structure known so deeply that it is taken for granted. . . ." (Bateson, 1994, p. 31) and so it was for me and the chameleon story.

The chameleon had a wonderful gift for being able to take on the shape and the worldview of the others around her. This I have tried to do in my life, especially at school, as principal. As a principal I spin threads and add rhythmic movements to connect people, ideas and beliefs, creating a space where diversity is celebrated and everyone's gift becomes a separate heartbeat, a rhythm woven into the fluid design of the story of school. DePree (1989) asks, "Would you rather work as a part of an outstanding group or be a part of a group of outstanding individuals?" (p. 29). For me, this speaks to the chameleon and her ability to re-present the view of others as a part of the whole dance. In this way individual dancers in a group participate, as a dance company, discussing the images for their dance and opening the conversation in the common spaces, of the jungle on the close side of the Savannah.

Maxine Greene (1988) writes about the need to discover the common spaces as a place or space of dialogue and possibility. "The aim is to find (or create) an authentic public space, that is, one in which diverse human beings can appear before one another as, to quote Hannah Arendt, 'the best they know how to be'," (Greene, 1988, p. xi). Everyone enters each

conversation with different views, with different gifts to offer. Participation in the conversation makes it possible for these gifts to be expressed in different ways and at different times with respect for that very difference. A whispering cadence from the heartbeat of life itself can be felt and recognized as it represents this diversity through its compelling rhythm. The chameleon was able to build depth of understanding through the many connections that were flowing among the animals. Conversations began. "Exposure to difference encourages breadth of attention, a way of seeing that underlies ways of continuing to learn" (Bateson, 1994, p. 169). Every conversation that opens the way for different perspectives, differing world views to be shared, becomes a way for "dealing constructively with inner or outer change" (Bateson, 1994, p. 168). This is a way to be in the dance. Michael Fullan (1993) defines inner changes as "intrapersonal sense making". The notion of outer change he describes as learning in relation and collaboration with others (p. 138). This would be like the forming of a dance company, with a shared sense of the images, to be held at the heart of the company, as distinct from a group of individual dancers.

"Confidence depends on identity; adaptive insight depends on difference" (Bateson, 1994, p. 168). The little chameleon brought these elements to my life and conversation, but her

greatest contribution may have been in her ability to offer multiple ways of looking at the same question, yet enhancing the capacity for each voice to contribute a distinctive worldview.

> How does one school learn to do things differently?
>
> . . . if education is conceived as a process of futuring, of releasing persons to become different, of provoking persons to repair lacks and to take action to create themselves then action must signify beginnings or the taking of initiatives; and, in education, beginnings must be thought possible if authentic learning is expected to occur. (Greene, 1988, p. 22)

"What insights arise from the experience of multiplicity and ambiguity?" (Bateson, 1989, p. 10). "Learning is the new continuity for individuals, innovation the new continuity for business" (Bateson, 1994, p. 83). What, I wonder, is the new continuity for schools? Can continuity and unity be explored in the whole dance by honoring the rhythm of the individual dancers as they attempt to explore their own expression of the images for the whole composition? Fullan (1993) believes that the "future of the world is a learning future . . . it is a world where change mirrors 'life itself' and must be viewed as 'a way of life'" (p. 4). Bateson writes that we live with multiple representations each one proposing new connections. The little chameleon has reminded me that people see things in more than one way and

our daily experience may contain within it a multiplicity of vision that proposes the willingness to question what has been taken for granted (Bateson, 1994, p. 53).

My Research Begins

I reflected on my experiences at Bisset School, through my own worldview, and have uncovered narrative threads that weave together the story of how this one school came to be all that it was for me and the other people involved in the story. My research, then, is the study of school from my perspective as principal, as well as the study of my own identity, as the principal within the context of school held within the larger scope of my world. "We think of the self as a central continuity, yet recognizing that the self is not identical through time is a first step in celebrating it as fluid and variable, shaped and reshaped by learning" (Bateson, 1994, p. 64). I have used three different settings and times as I have written this narrative. I have marked these differences with the use of different notations in the same way a dancer might note the changing tempo or mood while recording a specific dance sequence. My stories of school (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995), my reflections and understandings of these stories and the place for these stories within the larger world of my experience are the tempos which helped me to explore and make sense from my narrative inquiry (Connelly &

Clandinin, 1990). I have indicated these three variations with different styled print. My stories of school and the excerpts from school letters and journals appear in this type of notation. I used a "sans serif" notation when I situated my writing in the larger view of my world and finally as I have come to understand my stories of school and my story to live by I have used this print. There is a pattern, like a dance to the changing and flowing notations. They have helped me to explore the depth, and layered relationships of my world.

Telling My Bisset School Story

When I first became involved in the story of Bisset School, I imagined the possibilities of what might be created in a school as a place for children. I imagined with my mind and my heart a common space where children could define their worlds, make contributions to those worlds and then imagine new worlds as new experiences were lived. I imagined a place that they could hold in their hearts, as they learned to dance along with the other dancers, each making sense of their own steps. I had the opportunity to create a school from the beginning...a brand new elementary school with no existing traditions, just new beginnings. For the first time, in my professional life, I was approaching this exciting experience with an intertwined identity, that of principal and of new mother. This offered me a new

perspective for my imaginings, a complimentary rhythm for my dancing. As Bateson (1994) writes I was building an imagined future "from something new and something old" (p. 83). Never having opened a new school before and never having been an expectant mother before, I 'improvised along the way' from my lived experience and my ability to imagine possibilities. I was learning to choose the context in which I was able to choreograph the dance for connecting my future imaginings with my existing learning from my lived experience.

> The contexts have to be 'chosen' by living human beings against their own life-worlds and the light of their lives with others, by persons able to call, to say, to sing and-using their imaginations, tapping their courage-to transform. (Greene, 1995, p. 198)

I wished to transform my imaginings for a place called school into Bisset School.

Maxine Greene (1988) wishes to

> . . . seek a vision of education that brings together the need for wide-awakeness with the hunger for community, the desire to know with the wish to understand, the desire to feel with the passion to see. . . . Tragedy, however, discloses and challenges; often, it provides images of men and women on the verge. (p. 23)

Tragedy did play a part in the narrative of Bisset School. It was one of the unifying threads of discontinuity that wove its way

through our living tapestry, a rhythm for our dance. Because of some of the tragic experiences in our history we had to create and re-create our common world.

We had to trust one another, honor and value the storied lives that each of us were living and discover those values and beliefs that were truly important to each of us, and to all of us collectively. We didn't know what these were, we had to figure them out as we went along, seeing familiar things in new ways. We were on the edge...on the verge of learning a new way of seeing the jungle, on the close side of the Savannah.

Jimmy's Story

I always cry, hot tears rolling down my face, my voice breaking with an emotion I can't control, when I read to my children at school the story "Why wear a Poppy?" This is a story I occasionally choose to read for a special school assembly for Remembrance Day. I don't read it every year. There are years when I just don't feel strong enough. The tears come, not because Remembrance Day itself has a particularly strong impact for me or my family, but because I am remembering another little boy...

The old woman in the story is remembering, too, a son that she lost to a war; a war that was supposed to end all wars. My pain is different from hers, but I choose to read this story as

a way of making the far-removed concept of the World Wars meaningful for the little people that are looking for connections to their own worlds. Right now this complex understanding has little meaning to them. But it does to me. The little boy that I am remembering is a precious child whom I nearly lost in a different war. That little boy is my son and I nearly lost him three weeks after he was born.

One image that stands out for me still is this tiny bundle lying in white sheets on a white bed, in a sterile room, with tubes of life protruding from his head, his arm and his hand. He was just lying, not moving and barely breathing, with the meaningless hustle and bustle of the medical staff in the background. At first I would just stand beside the bed and wonder how this could be happening to me, to Jimmy, to Neil, to our family. Then, something in me would stir and I would touch Jimmy's cheek, rub his little hand and sing softly all of the songs that I could remember from my childhood. I would talk to him in a hushed voice about hope, the light, the moon and of his place in my heart.

Jimmy; James Arthur Bruce Robblee, a name with many family connections, traditions and history. His is a name that rings for me with the many possibilities of great things yet to come. Jimmy was born in August of 1989, three weeks before Bisset School staff welcomed their children for the very first

time. My children of Bisset grew to know Jimmy and became a part of his story, just as he was to become a part of their stories, over the next seven years. I shared Jimmy, his adventures, his ways of figuring out life's problems and my many reactions as a mother, with these, my other children. He became a character in most of my stories as I tried to articulate my thought about what was really important for me, the staff, the parents, and the children, as our work together evolved and grew towards the creation of a learning community that included each of us.

When I cry, while reading the story, the children, parents, and staff knowing that my story turned out with a happy ending, listen intently as I tell of my fears, doubts, anguish, helplessness and powerlessness that washed through my whole being. These connections were forever woven into the tapestry of school life. School life came to include real caring, tragedy, crisis, survival, learning, support, belonging, and a sense of what is meaningful and important to real people. I was sharing a piece of my soul that included everyone as a special person with a valuable story to tell.

Jimmy came to school on the very first day, eighteen days old, wrapped up in what was to become his favorite blanket. He was held by many different loving arms. "Who is that?" people would ask.

"This is my son, he will one day be a student here, just like

you are now. You get to pave the way for him," I would proudly say. The smile and glow of motherhood radiated like the sun. The children and parents of Bisset saw me as a mother, and as a principal. In those first few days it was hard to say what came first, mother or educator, but there was a blending of those two roles as the days, months and years passed. As time passed it would become more and more difficult to separate the two voices when I spoke, especially when I spoke about children and their place in this world called school. Jimmy became my reference point, as we created a community in which all children would grow, love, and be valued for the stories and experiences that they would bring to our school.

There was a staff get-together at my house after the first day at school. We gathered, as colleagues, to share and to discuss the day and the hopes for the days to come. Jimmy would occasionally cry (I remember it as a kind of chirping sound) as he was being held or fed. Marlene, a mother and program assistant at our school, remembers believing that the sound coming from Jimmy was not the voice of a well little soul. She was worried, so asked about Jimmy daily. Several days later Jimmy was back in hospital. He was a very sick baby boy. The next four weeks or so in my life took on a different focus, different than the one that I had imagined as the Principal of a brand new elementary school. Many hours were spent at the

hospital until, no longer being able to cope there, I would return to school and the people there. A pattern began to develop where I would spend mornings and evenings at the hospital and afternoons at school. My husband, Neil, also developed a new routine, so that we could spell each other off, spending important time together, and still spending some time at school.

It was after lunch and just a few minutes before the children would be returning to their classrooms for their afternoon experiences, that Gerry, the year 5/6 teacher, and I were standing outside his classroom. "Sue, why are you here? We're okay and things at school are all right."

"Gerry," I said, "I'm here because I just can't cope with the hospital. They aren't sure what's wrong. There are tests after tests, each one of them causing more pain and tears with Jimmy screaming every time someone in white comes near him. Being here, I can put away some of the pain and focus on something different for awhile. This is where I need to be for a time." The children began to come in from outside. Some of the older children looking at me as tears were welling up in my eyes, I'd blink, take a deep breath, smile and continue..."I'm worried about Jimmy, but I will be okay." The children would nod and go into class. Gerry gave me a hug and without a word, he too went into class.

Judy, our school secretary, recalls how focused I would be

at the times when I was there at school. There were things that I could do, where I could feel at least for a time, sheltered from the world I would be returning to...all too soon. I would talk with parents about programming decisions, about the bussing, about their children and about other problems that they were facing. I would play the Principal role for people outside of our school: consultants, senior administration, bus companies, builders, contractors, and suppliers. We would share experience as a staff and have conversations about what needed to be done next. I would reassure them that I trusted what they were doing and had confidence in their abilities to handle what needed to be done inside and outside their classrooms. There were a few times when Judy hoped that a particular child could handle the classroom activities until I got to school to help resolve the anxiety. I knew what to do with out-of-control children. There were two youngsters with severe emotional and behavioral difficulties, who were having trouble adjusting to a new school environment, just as we were quickly trying to know who they were. In most cases I was there when I was needed. Maureen remembers being worried about Jimmy, certainly, but also being worried that she might lose me, because of a possible decision to stay at home. She wondered how I was going to survive, and cope with what lay before me and still continue to be involved in this new place called Bisset. Maureen and I were coming to

know each other and she didn't want this newly-found connection to be broken. Maureen had her own little boy at home, not that much older than Jimmy. She tried to put herself in my shoes and didn't know if she could do what was necessary. "We do what we must. I know that those things which must be done will be done," was my common response. This is still a phrase often heard at school. I would have missed the weaving of these roles as thread through my soul and as connections to what is really important to me in school. I could model and articulate these important things because of my storied experience with Jimmy.

Through this time Bisset became one of my sacred places, sacred in the sense that it was a place where I could be who I was, I could contribute my gifts and talents to a shared undertaking of many people. I was not alone and felt the support of the many people around me: staff, parents and children. I belonged to this place. Many other basic needs were not met...sleep, food, exercise, to mention just a few, but there was a common understanding that Jimmy came first, so I had the freedom to do what I thought I needed to do. This also has stayed as a part of my story and of our story of Bisset School, of doing the right things first and remembering children were the heart and soul of our work together. We learned how to support one another.

Throughout this period of Bisset's beginning there was no officially designated leader in my absence. Decisions were made, teaching and learning occurred, and it was all very low key...doing that which made sense to do under the circumstances. Gerry recalls a particular assembly (we had weekly ones) when I was not there. The agenda for the assembly was "behavior" (no one clearly remembers why this was an agenda topic). The staff looked around at each other for a second or two. No one had been appointed to lead the assembly. Gerry, in that moment, decided that he was the most senior, by a couple of months, so he took on the role of speaking to the children. It just seemed the right thing to do at the time and everyone agreed and instantaneously played out that decision. The children were told that I was not with them because I was at the hospital with Jimmy. As Jimmy's health improved and life settled down to a more predictable pattern, he was still very much a part of the story of school.

People opened many a conversation with "How is Jimmy?" He became a shared experience that we all lived through and contributed to in our own ways. Sandy, the kindergarten teacher, brought a cabbage patch doll playpen, which had been her daughter's for the back of my office by the window, for Jimmy to sleep in whenever he came to school. I, as Mom, was not yet ready to leave Jimmy with someone else for long periods

of time. As a Principal, I found ways to do the work that was important to me in ways that honored both of my roles. The children loved to see him. They would take turns pushing him in his stroller and taking him out for "recess". Other children read him stories and told him of their brothers and sisters. Children who were having difficulties in certain circumstances never raised their voices when I said, "shh, shh, Jimmy's sleeping." Jimmy was often invited to a classroom for music and singing. There were always toys around my office. The teddy bears, the books and the pictures were there for me, but some of the toys, cars, trucks, books and a few bears were there for a much more practical reason, they were for Jimmy. I'll never forget the day a "movie" was being played out over the top of my desk as the army of characters was moved into position with loving hands. Parents came to know that my office held a piece of childhood in its heart. There were more than a few occasions when I was speaking with a parent or staff member and Jimmy was playing under my desk, never interrupting, because he knew that this was something else that was important to me. The staff came to know as we grew together that the experiences and lives beyond school had a place in school. Family was important. Life was important. There were times when either of these two eventualities took precedence over the "job". The evolution of this was that school became a part of the family, of life, and of

whom we were becoming as people, and life was the becoming of who we were learning to be as educators. It was not the last time we, as a community, were to deal with the tragedies that life held for the people of our community.

I would share stories of Jimmy with the children of Bisset or with their parents, as a way of explaining the point of view I wished to have them understand. I told stories of how I saw him as a learner and the kinds of dilemmas I had as a parent so that other parents could have options to consider in their own decisions with their children. One day there was a discussion about what to do regarding a children's television show call the Power Rangers. I listened for a few minutes while the parents grappled with how to make their children stop watching this particular show. They were stuck. I tried a Jimmy story.

"Power Rangers is a show that I would just as soon not have Jimmy watch, because I don't think that it's an example of good programming for kids. I know that it comes on right at the time I'm usually making supper. Instead of having Jimmy watch television so that I have time to make dinner, I ask him to help me. We have fun setting the table, making salad and generally getting supper ready so that when we're done, the show is over. Jimmy and I then talked about what he thinks about the show and what I think about the show. Together, we decided that he knows the difference between real life and fantasy, but we didn't

like to see people solving problems only by fighting. Jimmy decided that if there were other things to do he could and would make a different choice."

The parents now had another strategy to use only it didn't come from the single principal perspective, a mother's voice was also heard. The voice the parent heard was one born of compassion, understanding and acknowledgment of the difficult role of a parent...it was a mother's story too.

I also shared all of Jimmy's triumphs with the children: when he first walked, or the first words he said, or the funny and sad things that he did. I talked with parents about how to observe learning at home through Jimmy stories. I talked about the importance of sharing these insights with their child's teacher because we were just carrying on where they had left off. I would relate how Jimmy loved to practice and practice a new idea before he would become confident with it and then transfer it to a new setting. He would line up his cars first one way and then another until the pattern was just right. I would often find his cars just that way for the next few weeks. This was the bridge between life at home and life at school. We needed lots of travel on our bridges! I shared with staff things that were important to me because of Jimmy. I learned so much about what was important to me from sharing those stories. We all shared stories from our lives about the ideas essential to our

work together. Conversations were about things like the importance of every child feeling successful, of every child feeling accepted for who they are and the stories that they have to share, of every decision that we consciously make having the best interest of children at the very heart. A central theme centered around recognizing that we're doing what we do because we know that is the best for children, the way they learn, grow, develop and make meaning about the world...their world.

Jimmy grew up experiencing Bisset School for five years before he became a student in our school. The children of Bisset also grew up knowing all about Jimmy as an important part of my life, a life that was also connected to Bisset School. I was able to share myself with the Bisset community, so that they knew me as a mother, a principal, a friend and someone to trust with their children, their life stories.

Now as I read the story "Why wear a Poppy?" I don't forget the importance of shared experience and lived experience in our story of school. I think back to the old woman and wonder about the stories she has of her son. Maybe she has stories like mine...Jimmy stories. Loss is tragic no matter how it happens, and I feel very deeply for that mother who lost her son. I will never forget the image of my little boy and I still cry when I remember what Bisset School means to both of us as we

journey onwards.

Retelling the Bisset School Story

When I lay these two stories, The Chameleon and Jimmy's Story, side by side, I see many connections and threads that link the two. "The self is the basic thread with which we bind time into a single narrative. We improvise and struggle to respond in unpredictable and unfamiliar contexts, learning new skills and transmuting discomfort and bewilderment into valuable information about difference-even at the same time, becoming someone different" (Bateson, 1995, p. 67). I was becoming someone different as I learned with the support and caring of my staff to blend my world of school and my world of motherhood into one dance through which I continued to learn about who I am. It was through the telling of my stories, which were very central to my life, that I was able to make sense out of my life. "The stories and narratives that we hear and the stories that we tell shape the meaning and texture of our lives at every stage and juncture" (Witherell and Noddings, 1991, p. 1). Stories are a way that I imagine the possibilities for myself, for my life and for life in a school. Clandinin and Connelly (1991) describe this process of envisioning possibility for both individuals and for individuals in a school as "growth towards an imagined future that involves 'restorying and attempts at reliving'

experience and ways of knowing" (p. 265). "Reflecting on the meaning of past experiences together . . . helps staff to form powerful communities of memory which remind everyone that it does make a difference who we are and how we treat one another" (Cooper, 1996, p. 127). Bisset School had a very strong "community of memory" in the complex layering of Jimmy stories that formed a richness of color and a depth of movement to the threads of our living tapestry.

My Narrative Inquiry

"The study of narrative . . . is the study of the way humans experience the world." We may capture the essence of the experiences in our lives and the lives of others by collecting and telling our stories. Narrative inquiry is both the phenomenon and the method for research as it "names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and . . . the patterns of inquiry for it's study" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). "It has been said that if we as individuals are to determine what our relationship is to some ideas of the good, we must inescapably understand our lives in narrative form, as a quest (Taylor, as quoted by Greene, 1995, p. 1).

As I reconstructed the Bisset School story from my own

stories and memories I explored this narrative form as a dancer making sense from the images held within the dance in relation to the other dancers and their dancing. I used five other data sources. In doing this I reflected on existing data such as school documents (the school budget documentation, my year end letters to staff and other written information to staff from the school years, 1989-1996), cards and personal notes given to me over my years as the principal of Bisset School, and Response Journal entries made throughout my seven years.

I had conversations with nine children of different ages about their experiences at Bisset School. These conversations took place in three small groups with three children to a group. Notes were taken and I used these notations to write composite stories of the children's school experiences. I shared these stories with the children and their parents to gain any further comment or insights from them as valued participants in the whole dance.

I had many conversations with ten staff members. These ten staff members were the original staff hired in the spring of 1989 and who are still continuing dancers in the Bisset School story. When I use the word 'staff', throughout my writing, I am referring to teaching staff, support staff and custodial staff. I kept notes of these conversations and used them to write our stories of school. All of the writing was shared with participating

staff as writing-in-progress for their feedback, and our continued reflection. I discovered recurring threads and made sense of the stories, conversations, and writing by using a narrative inquiry approach.

Ethical Considerations

Permission from the participating school district, current principal, staff members, parents and students was obtained for my narrative inquiry. Actual student names have not been used. Staff were given the choice of using pseudonyms, which they declined because they felt that this was also their story. They were so intricately involved in the story of school as it was happening that they truly wanted their voices to be heard in the writing of this story. Opportunities were given for everyone to read all of my writing as it was happening as well as in its completed form. Specific people in each story read the stories of school, made suggestions and provided their touches. These are the stories of our dance together. The honor and dignity of all people, their stories and their lived experiences have been respected as a part of the living tapestry of Bisset School.

Children of the World are We

As I drive home from school, the words from the school song echo in my mind. Gerry, Sandy and Deb created the school song for our

official school opening, eight years ago. It is a melody that leaves me with memories that linger in my soul and speak to the heart of Bisset School. When the voices of the children sing this beautiful song, I have a tear in my eye and a smile in my heart as I hear the heartbeat of the universe and glimpse the future of the world as the music rings throughout the school.

"Children of the world are we,
learning, sharing, so carefree.
Coming together so cheerfully,
Happy to be me.
Here we are at school you see,
a place that's made for you and me.
Working together in harmony,
Happy to be me. . . ."(Staff Handbook, Bisset School).

In my imagination I'm listening to the singing. I see the happy faces of the children as they step forward into the world, their world as they are learning to understand it.

So my story begins as I have chosen to tell it. Every moment holds a story. It is not possible to retell every story, nor relive every moment, but I have written the stories that have come to me as I explored my practices as a school principal, a mother, a dancer, a choreographer and a learner. This is who I am.

MORAL IMAGINATION...AN IMAGE FOR THE DANCE

I've Been Wondering...

In my imagination I 'listen' to the world around me, as if it's waking up from the long, long winter. I feel the need to be situated in the possibilities that are inherent in the seasons of my imagination because it helps me to feel connected and to recognize the potential of something bigger than just the moment itself... "a more vibrant way of being in the world" (Greene, 1995, p. 5). I create meaning and understanding as I remember what is important to me as a principal, as a mother, and as a person entrusted with the lives of the children in my school. "It is imagination that draws us on, that enables us to make new connections among parts of our experience, that suggests the contingency of the reality we are envisaging" (p. 30).

I have been wondering...wondering about starting places and starting points. Where do I begin as I look to understanding my life as a school principal? How have I begun before in the memory of time? How do I know what needs to be done? How do I know what I do?

I am listening to the rain as it lands and joins with other raindrops to make patterns on my windowpane. The sound and cadence of the

dancing raindrops reminds me of the lake and a favorite pastime; watching the awakening of that world in the springtime.

I'm remembering the sight of the pussy willows, soft and gray on the red branches of the willow trees as I traveled to the lake for the first visit this spring. At the lake I sit and listen anew to the plaintive call of the elusive white-throated sparrow looking for a mate, and I wonder... I hear this sparrow, but I can't make her out against the backdrop of the bush, just coming awake, in tune with the changing seasons, a rhythm and dance that is as old as time itself. And I wonder... Here there are no starting points, only cycles and circles, ritual and repetition, and yet there is a fluidity that brings change and newness, from the known to the unknown and back to that which is known. It is a beginning. It is a story. It is spring.

Spring is the time in the story that represents hope in the dance of time. The long winter has passed and the possibilities for this new season have not yet been imprinted upon the earth. "We struggle to find a way of being that is truly hopeful" (Jevne, 1994, p. 111). There is hope in the familiarity of the steps that flow together to make a new sequence, in anticipation of that which has yet to unfold. "People trying to be more fully awake must be able to imagine something coming of their hopes" (Greene, 1995, p. 25). It opens the way for my own imagination to set the dance steps to the music that I hear, as I become mindful of the world waking up around me. And I wonder... "In

the heart of each of us, there is a voice of hope, a small voice that yearns to say "yes" to life. If nurtured and strengthened, it invites us to go forward" (Jevne, 1994, p. 8). Hope for me is in knowing that what is provided is not the entire dance syllabus, but the invitation to join the dance class.

How will I join the dance around me and have others add my steps to theirs? How will their steps be linked to mine as we come together like the rain-drops on the window, landing and joining to make new patterns for our dance? How will my dance be different and yet in concert with all that surrounds me? What rhythms will we choose to explore as we step into the unknown through a dance that calls to us, as the "p h e e b e " sound calls to the white-throated sparrow? I wonder about this, and know that all the while, we are creating the stories that once told, will join us inextricably together, as we continuously move through the cycles and circles of time. How will I share all that I experience as my movements form a sequence of steps, so that others may find their rhythm and cadence for the sharing of their hope, and their anticipation, for our combined efforts in our ongoing work together? "To place our lives in perspective to others, to our universe" (Jevne, 1994, p. 92) is like the invitation to dance, the enticement to keep practicing and inventing, in relationship with others, the artistry and technique of our craft. I'm thoughtful and wonder, in tune with the changing seasons,

about the steps that call me to participate, with hope and anticipation, situated inside the vista of my imagination as the dance continues anew from the echoes of the past, in the pulse of time itself. "All depends upon a breaking free, a leap, and then a question" (Greene, 1995, p. 6). And I wonder...

The White Rabbit

A new day begins with sunshine and an eggshell blue colored sky as I turn into the parking lot at my school. I am not the first to arrive as I glance at the other cars. I know that all is well, as I glimpse the empty soccer fields and the deserted play park. I've seen and noticed what I expected to see, as my car splashes through the spring 'rivers and lakes' heading towards the drain in the centre of the parking lot. My eye wanders to a fenced off area encasing the mini-power unit just to the left of the parking lot. I'm searching, I realize, for my white rabbit which is not the white rabbit of Alice in Wonderland fame (Carroll, 1865, in Cullinan, 1989, p. 116), but the rabbit I've noticed many mornings sunning herself in the shelter of this square gray structure. She's not hard to see these days, even though she sits perfectly still with only her blinking eye taking into account my arrival. She, too, has felt the pull of the seasons and is changing her beautiful white coat for her summer apparel of light brown, only the black tips of her long ears remaining constant throughout the cycles of time. "I must remember to leave her

some more carrots" floats through my mind as I turn to wave to Monica pulling to a stop beside me. "Shh, shh," I gestured and indicated my friend the rabbit, who was twitching her ears with anticipation. She was getting ready to bolt. One person giving her attention was okay, but with two she was getting jumpy!

It was Wednesday and so as Monica and I wandered into the school we were discussing Monica's plans for her after school art club. Art was one of Monica's passions. It calls to her. This club had 75 children from grades one through six who joined Monica after school for an hour to learn and to share this passion. She was exploring alternate ways of working with multi-age groupings through mentoring, modeling, grouping strategies, reflecting and goal setting. We were endeavoring to explore ideas about effective combinations for mixing content, interest, passion and large numbers of children together and still ensuring exciting teaching and learning opportunities for all of the people involved in the experience. "Do you have enough helpers for tonight? I can stay tonight, if you'd like. Besides, I'd like to try my hand at sketching! I need all the help I can get!" I always liked to go to art club when I could. I would get a chance to learn and practice my own skills, but also to notice and to get caught up in the children's enthusiasm as the world of art slowly awakened in their imaginations. Monica was a teacher-researcher, writing and thinking about art in the lives of children,

as a part of her own master's work at the University (Donadt, 1995). Monica and I smiled and laughed as we made our way into the pink and blue building, which was home for our hopes. These hopes were embedded in the possibilities held within our collective imaginations, as we anticipated yet another school day.

Imagination, a world that I share, create and form for myself on the inside, allowing the overlapping stories, combination of steps and insights gleamed from all the people involved in our story of school, on the outside of my imagination to shape and reshape the flowing pattern of the dance. Anne Morrow Lindbergh (1955) writes about a state of an inner harmony that can be translated into ideas for reflecting upon through an outward harmony and congruence with the surrounding world. This is how she describes the connections between who she is, who she is becoming, and her process for understanding the moments in her life that she values. I also need my "outward (spirit) and my inward (imagination) to be as one" (Lindbergh, 1955, p. 23) so that I can notice and adapt the rhythms from the world in which I live. "We walk up the beach in silence, but in harmony, as the sandpipers ahead of us move like a corps of ballet dancers keeping time to some interior rhythm inaudible to us" (p. 101).

Raindrops landing and joining to make unique patterns on the windowpane, a fleeting moment within the day. The designs they create leaving an impression, like a moment of clarity, of hope, the break in the clouds, connecting the people, place and time in this current dance within the vista of my imagination.

"Hoping is noticing that the glimpses are woven into the fabric of life as a unique tapestry. Creating a pattern that is continually unfolding - sometimes consciously, sometimes outside of our awareness" (Jevne, 1994, p. 135). "Imagination breathes life into experience . . . there is always more to experience and more in what we experience that we can predict" (Greene, p. 22).

Imagination, too, is much more than this single or telescopic view because it is the essence of who I am and who I am becoming in concert with the elements of my defined world. It is my way. I'm not using the word vision to describe my 'inside' view of the possibilities that I imagine for the future of education in my school life. In using that single word alone, it narrowly focuses and implies for me a sense that if I take the 'right' series of steps in tune with the current music, I will reach the point where this 'vision' is truth...the only dance. Dance and dancing is much more than one variation on any theme. It also encompasses the soul and spirit of the dancer in concert with the other elements including music, choreographers, time, place

and audience.

In my imagination, as I listen to the world around me, I am creating meaning and understanding as I remember what is important to me as a principal, as a mother, and as a person entrusted with the lives of the children in my school. My values and beliefs add the counterpoint to my dance. This counterpoint is the richness, the depth and the harmony that blends to add heightened excitement and anticipation for the next sequence and the next, until the whole dance is in the mind and heart of the dancer and/or the audience.

Bisset Buddies

"Bisset Buddies" is a two-word phrase embroidered on our school T-shirts underneath the school logo. These two words describe an activity that began as a single step in our evolving dance and became something much more deeply felt in the tone that it created. It was like the raindrops creating new designs on the window pattern within the rhythm of spring.

"What opportunity are we going to create so that all of us, children from three major feeder schools and a new school staff, can get to know one another and begin to develop a sense of belonging to this new place?" I asked. "Why don't we organize some family grouping activities for that first week of school?" suggested Mel. "What about having buddies for all the kids?"

asked Mark. "Would buddies also help when the smaller children are riding the buses?" wondered Phyllis. "Bus buddies, especially for the youngest children?" thought Sandy. Sandy continued that "maybe we should have buddy classes...the younger classes matched up with older children?" "What kinds of activities should we be thinking about for our buddy classes?" Deb pondered. And it came into being that every child in the school would have a Bisset buddy and every class would have a buddy class. We were thinking and planning this as an event and as a way to begin our first school year together. We wanted to plan an activity to help the children feel a sense of belonging in the temporary school building that we were using until our own school home was ready. This plan successfully helped everyone feel connected to "Bisset School" and to other people, both younger and older, in the larger school community. Over time this piece of our dance became stronger as variation after variation was incorporated into the music of our school. The year 5/6 classes taught dancing as part of the physical education program to the kindergarten classes. They were also their recess buddies outside when the kindergarten children were first being introduced to the school routine and rhythm of recess. The year 3/4 children read daily to the year 1/2 children. The 1/2 classes performed their songs, poetry and stories for their big buddies. At celebrations, time was spent on joint art projects,

making displays of student work, and sharing of family customs and traditions. School wide themes were the beginnings of many buddy activities and set the tone for the time children spent with each other in school. The buddy program eventually became the centre of our pro-social program...Bisset Kids make Caring Choices. Little and big buddies were inviting each other over to their homes for birthday parties and barbecues all spinning their way out from our beginning first step. Children knew one another, staff knew the children, children knew the staff and staff knew one another. In every new situation that we encountered as we traveled in our dances, we came to learn a different dance threading the old and familiar with the new and unfamiliar to create a dance unique to ourselves.

"My little buddy got hurt today. He was sliding down the twirly slide at the play park. He was pretending to be a red race car on the speedway, except he forgot to put the brakes on at the finish line! He landed with a hard thump on the ground. The tears were running down his crumpled face. He looked around and his teary eyes caught sight of me. Before I knew it, he was running towards me and held me in a bear hug. I hugged him back because I didn't know what else to do. Finally, I asked him what was wrong. We talked and I listened to the story he had to tell me. Before recess was over, he was smiling and thought that he needed another kind of race car, one that didn't blow up!

My heart felt so wonderful, as we raced, hand in hand, back to school. He had needed me." (Stories from children, Nov. 96).

The *Bisset Buddies* became something alive and with a life of its own because we were aware, and in tune, with the heartbeat of the school, recognizing and honoring the possibilities that we had not consciously planned for. And I wonder...

Imagination is my hope for the future, like spring is in the pattern of the ever changing yet constant seasons. It has fluidity that brings a need for change and new ideas as life flows from the known to the unknown and back to that which is known. "A knowing that comes from noticing the unexplainable: the dreams, the power of caring, and the sense of trust. This knowing is intimately connected with my hope. I recognize that hoping is being able to trust myself" (Jevne, 1994, p. 95). Imagination is a beginning place for me, a safe place, where I weave the bits collected from everywhere; people and places, experiences and stories, that form questions as I continue to wonder about these stories entwined in stories; in the circles and cycles of time.

> It is only in the experience of a beginning that persons feel themselves to be the initiators, the authors of what they are doing or intending to do . . . it is in the nature of a beginning that something new

> is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before. (Greene, 1995, p. 21)

When I use the word imagination to describe my images, hopes, dreams, experience and understandings, I'm not referring to the flights of fancy that Alice in Wonderland experienced, but the view, the limits that I hold in my heart, mind and soul, that help me to think and wonder about what is the very best we can do for and with children. I'm thinking, instead, about a moral imagination grounded within the limits of who I am, in the context of my lived experience. Within the landscape of my moral imagination the dreams, hopes, images, and stories are situated awaiting the call of the white-throated sparrow to be joined, so the dance may begin. My moral imagination allows me to blend the voices of the past with the songs of the present to create new melodies, dances and stories for the future. It is my moral imagination that helps me to ask the questions that call to me—
"p h e e b e".

Greene (1995) writes about the idea of a social imagination as "an idea of imagination that brings an ethical concern to the fore . . . which has to do with the community that ought to be in the making and the values that give it color and significance . . . what it is to be in the world." She also explores the moral functioning of imagination as a way to "choose and to

reach beyond . . . to heighten the consciousness" and to make one's own interpretations of what is being noticed (p. 35). For me, as I combine the concept of ethical or moral limits with that of imagination, it becomes like a pas de deux, a dance that places me within the confines of my own imagination. It is a way for me to be in the world, as well as a means to open up new worlds. "All we can do, I believe, is cultivate multiple ways of seeing and multiple dialogues in a world where nothing stays the same" (p. 16). "If we can link imagination to our sense of possibility and our ability to respond to other human beings, can we link it to the making of a community as well?" (p. 38). And I wonder...

Coles (1989) uses the phrase 'moral imagination'. He does not, however, explore this reference beyond wondering about a new way, or perhaps another way to listen to the stories of people who are asking for answers to the questions that trouble their lives. Coles wonders whether answers lie within the stories that people themselves hold and in the stories that they are willing to tell and to reflect upon. I, too, believe that moral imagination holds this within the possibilities of the pas de deux.

What do we know about teaching and learning? What are the values and beliefs that we each use to set limits on our imaginations in order to wonder about what is good, real and/or true for any particular fleeting moment in our dances? Do we

show our children, each other, what we value as an important part of life, not just school life? Are we learning? What is the very best we can create in a school, for learners, for each of us as learners? How will my actions, decisions and everyday interactions with people be reflective of my moral imagination? How do we dance together adding color and life to make even a small piece of that moral imagination come alive into our shared story? What is the story that we want told? How will I use my moral imagination to provide the hope, the vision, and the rhythm so that all may join the dance or hear the call of the white-throated sparrow? And I wonder...

Rhythms

The early morning sunlight streams into my office as I stop there briefly to hang up my coat. I turn around and smile fondly at the array of objects lining the top of my cupboards. These treasures are filled with memories of special moments linked to stories of people who have joined the dance with me as we, each in our own way, figure out a pattern for our own dance steps which combine and flow to compliment the essence of the whole dance.... This is the way we have chosen and learned to work, and to share our time and our storied lives at school. There is the poetry written from her heart by Monica, a picture from Sandy speaking of friendship, the fitness reminder from Mark, a wooden carving that intricately fits a young bear cub

within the embrace of her mother from Judy and a story journal from Barb.

The stories, held within these objects, represent the shared meaning that our work holds for us. This meaning finds its place against the backdrop held within the edges of the moral imagination that we are discovering with our work together...learning from each other the dance steps that fit together. The small details of our daily rhythms and routines are ever so important because they are connected to the bigger story held within the moral imagination.

On my way out of my office, as I look towards the staff room, I fill the candy dish and make sure that the glass teddy bear that holds the teddy bear crackers is also full. I smell the hazelnut coffee brewing in the staff room but, just before I fill my coffee cup, I pause to see if anyone has added a message to the daily memo. I read it once again and thankfully refresh my memory for the daily events scheduled. The staff room for me is the pulse of the school. It is here that I 'listen' attentively to sounds enveloping me as I begin to sense that cadence indicating whether the 'vital signs' are as they should be. The signs might register that something, possibly yet unnamed, is ringing a bell or calling to me in the recesses of my soul. This is a signal that all is not well and something, somewhere, may need my attention, focus, or at least awareness and

acknowledgment that every life is a story waiting to be told.

I hear Mark shout a "thanks" for his morning supply of crackers and smile at Shannon who is getting her supplies ready for the day. Sandy and I talk about a little person in her class who is writing like crazy but having some difficulty with reading and Laurel is wondering about the primary team newsletter and whether I have anything to include. I notice that Darcy seems a little 'brusque' this morning and, through the window looking out into the library, I'm vaguely aware that children have started to arrive. Cindy is on her way outside for supervision and pauses to share a comment and a laugh. Gerry is wondering if I remembered that Pat was bringing guests from another school to visit us today. I nod and ask Peggy if she would like to join me as we invite our visitors to join our world. As Deb pops into the staff room, I ask her how her boys are and whether she had given any thought to our science supply storage problem.

I glance at the wall beside the windows looking into the library, and I think about the mural covering the wall. We, as a staff, created it throughout the year, a dance score, to represent the adventures we have had and the important ideas that we want to keep focused in our imaginations as we make sense of our daily lives. There is a caption which reads 'setting wonder free' over a brilliant colored rainbow with a 'v' of geese winging their way towards it. The second phrase, 'everyone a leader and

everyone a learner', lingers in my mind.

"Hope is appreciating that we can act. Hope is understanding that we are all learners and all teachers. That we need each other to deepen and mature our hope" (Jevne, 1994, p. 53).

Assemblies

It's Friday...assembly day! One of the rituals and ceremonies of our school life are weekly assemblies. In our very first month of school we wanted the children to begin to feel a sense of belonging and to see themselves as participants in this 'new' community that we were all composing together.

It began as a single idea much like the image that a dancer holds in her mind as she begins to explore the range of movements and motions possible that would bring this image to life; the purpose, motivation and hope for the dance. The pattern of our assemblies evolved over time to include many different things. What began as a single step that enabled all the children and staff to see each other and to be physically together as one group developed into a complex design with many complimentary images and rhythms all blending together to create a dance much bigger than the individual steps or the individual dancers.

There is a tape playing our favorite assembly songs softly

in the background as the children file into the music room and later into the gym as we outgrew that smaller space. The rows of children sitting with their legs crossed watching and waiting for the signal which begins the assembly always makes me smile inside as I look at their faces and smile outwardly at these children who mean so much to me. "Would everyone please rise for the singing of Oh Canada." There were times when we would use a tape to accompany our voices and other times that Sandy, Janice, or Monica would play the piano. In a beginning assembly we taught the children the words to Oh Canada so they could sing it proudly at hockey and baseball games as well as other cultural and special events. I wanted to place the singing of this song within the larger picture of their lives. This was something that I hoped to do with many of our school endeavors, that is the making of connections with home, people, and ideas. My principal's message which followed Oh Canada usually centered on the whole dance, so the children might find ways to define their own world and to develop an image in their own imaginations that they could hold on to as they discovered ways to participate in the dance. This invitation to join the dance was a time during the assembly when I did not have a pre-planned speech to give, but improvised based on the 'vital signs' to which I was attuned. It was an opportunity for the whole school, children, staff and parents, who are always invited, to

begin to know and understand the values and beliefs that were really important to me...the deepening of the counterpoint for our dance together.

I remember one assembly when I asked the children, "Girls and Boys, who do you think is responsible for your learning?" I was amazed to see that many of them felt that their teachers, or their parents , or that I were responsible for their learning! The question had just come to my mind as I was wondering about new ways that we might have the children reflect upon their own learning within the context of their world. This was not something that I had planned to speak to them about prior to walking into the gym, but I asked them because I was searching within the rhythms of school for a beginning. Over the next several assemblies we talked and shared experiences so the children would begin to understand that learning was a part of life, their lives, and a way for them to participate in the dance that they were composing in partnership, as an ensemble, with the people around them.

Assemblies were also times when we did things together as a whole school. There was singing, dancing, listening and sharing. These were the times when we shared the experiences of particular classes, individual children and staff. This was how we continued to develop ties and links with one another in participation, anticipation, or through the feeling of hope as each

of us was enveloped in something bigger than individuals alone. In this way we situated ourselves as dancers within the whole dance as we appreciated and enjoyed the efforts of others and the imagined glimmerings of continued participation for our next sequences together. We would sing along as the Kindergarten class taught us with the use of their 'Big Book', Four Hugs a Day. We watched and listened as the choir and/or the handbell choir played a piece that they were working on. Maureen always had a story for us or books to show us from the library, which were "must reads". Buddy classes demonstrated gymnastic routines and our Bisset skippers led by Mark performed some amazing synchronized routines. There were announcements made by children and staff about upcoming events and relevant ideas, which added to our current themes. All of this was a part of the assembly when I asked, "Does anyone have anything that they would like to share with us today?" This time together was unplanned and unstructured. It was the time when people could share what they were working on in their classrooms and in their everyday school lives. It helped provide the thread that continued to unite us as one, as children and staff alike heard, saw, touched, and felt the rhythm of the whole school community. Some Fridays there was a lot of sharing and other weeks there was only a little. This was the flow of our dance and it represented the rhythm and pattern of our school year.

No two assemblies from week to week, or year to year, were ever the same, but the assemblies were a pulse in our dance through time, providing continuity and awareness of each other. They were a way of building relationships like a dancer's "interactions between motor and perceptual activity making shapes in space and time that identify a dancer's literacy" (Greene, 1995, p. 179). They were yet another way to place within my moral imagination the ever changing cadence with its highs and lows, reflecting the dancers and their hopes and imaginings for our work together.

In the background I hear the phone ringing. As I make my way back to the general office I notice Darcy is coming in with a work order to give to Judy. I give Darcy a hug and mention that I am really glad that he helped to clean up after the parent meeting last night. "Darcy did you see our rabbit this morning? She's ready for spring!" And I wonder... "How about you, are you okay?" Darcy smiles.

"I'm just a little tired today. We can talk later, but I'm okay." Judy tells me that the phone call is for me and I return to my office. The school day has officially begun. And I wonder...

The rhythm of our dance repeats "you belong; you have a place here, a valued place. You are part of something larger, perhaps even something greater" (Jevne, 1994, p. 32).

Dance Notation...The Markers

The first official images that appeared in our dance, which represented our collective moral imaginings were our language learning statement and our written school philosophy statement. These two themes represented many conversations and hours of time spent in sharing our individual beliefs, values, and stories about schooling, schools, learning, children and ourselves. We listened and spoke about the hopes that we had for this new school that we were imagining. The memories of these conversations and the time we spent together, carefully choosing the words to represent what we truly meant, gave these two documents the magic of a touchstone—a touchstone that we could hold which kept alive the image and the magic for our dance. These two statements, like symbols in dance notation, marked a limit for our collective moral imaginations.

Philosophy Statement

At Bisset School we believe that:

- it is the right of all children to experience success.
- each child is unique and that individual student needs and interest will be met.
- children learn best in a safe, secure child-centered environment

Therefore, in our school, programs will be provided to develop academic achievement and positive self-esteem. We encourage our children to take

responsibility for their own learning. Everyone is a teacher and everyone is a learner (School Documents, 1989).

Language Learning Belief Statement

In 1989-1990 Bisset Elementary School will be a school of approximately 200 students from Kindergarten to year six where within the graded curriculum children's individual differences will be accommodated. Programs will be provided to develop academic achievement and positive self-esteem so that children feel successful in a school setting. Our school will have a language arts base with a focus on literature. Communication skills are essential to developing the necessary thinking process for handling all learning.

Here is a first draft of our language learning policy.

At Bisset School we believe that the more children read, the better readers they'll become; and the more they write, the better writers they will become. Since each child is unique, a literature-based program provides an ideal way to meet individual needs and interests.

Children learn best in a safe secure environment where they feel free to be creative, ask questions, share their experiences, thereby taking responsibility for their own learning.

It is the right of all children to experience success. Through our literature-based program children will maximize their individual potentials, which promotes positive self-esteem and academic achievement.

In a literature-based program, students are actively involved in using literature. This interactive process consists of"

1. exposure to a wide variety of literature (novel studies, hearing stories, silent reading, shared reading, home reading, creating stories, etc.)
2. responding to literature in a variety of ways (daily writing, class books, drama, role playing, discussion, thinking skills, etc.)
3. incorporating literature into other curricular areas to provide background, experiences, extensions of content.

The above are the vehicles used to teach the important mechanics of reading and writing—spelling, grammar, phonics, word attack skills, comprehension printing, cursive writing, etc.

We are really excited about sharing ideas and working together with you to create a child-centered teaching-learning environment (Bisset Newsletter, Fall, 1989).

These markers, like a waiting stage ringed with curtains, were a way for us to think about and to reflect upon the choices

we had and the unfolding decisions that we made about teaching and learning. We endeavored to use our collective touchstones for all of the 'conscious' decision making that we did individually and as a staff about our practices at school. They provided us with a way for looking at the possibilities and still ensuring that our practices were reflective of our stated thoughts and our moral imaginings. These documents were not written in stone to become heavy burdens, masking the image for the dance, in our traditions, but provided notations along the way that we could refer to and change as new circumstances might suggest...the rippling curtains made ready for the dance performance, adjusting, adapting to the flow of the dance and requirements of the dancers. The spirit of hope coming from knowing that we will be all right even when the tempo and direction of the dance give inspiration and continuity for yet another variation. For us, as a school staff, this hope added lift to our time together. It gave us a beginning for discussions and conversations so that we could continue to learn about who we were becoming within our lived experiences. Common language and understandings were essential for interpreting the whole dance so that individual variations would become possible and understood within the common practices of the school as valued and rhythmic contributions to the whole story of school. This helped us to choreograph and learn the variations that were

being improvised so the dance could continue to change and we as dancers could continue to learn about ourselves as dancers, within the context of this new dance.

Portfolios...An Image of Beliefs

"How are we going to communicate about student learning to our children and their parents? How can we provide information that really captures each classroom as a learning environment and each child as a learner within the context of their classroom? How can we involve children as learners in this process of communication? How can we involve parents? How can we represent the learning journey that children are making so that they can continue to feel successful on their journey?" (My Response Journal)

These were just some of the questions that we were asking as we tried to develop a way of reflecting our beliefs about teaching and learning as well as reflecting the knowledge that we held collectively about ourselves as learners and as teachers.

These questions along with the values and beliefs that marked the limits of our imaginations began us wondering about the possibility of using a different way of representing our thoughts about assessing and evaluating student learning. A student portfolio demonstrating what children could do over time

in relation to the Alberta Education curriculum documents seemed to be the beginning. We had no idea where this decision to use a portfolio instead of a report card would take us. The use of portfolios at Bisset School became a reflection of the very essence of who we were as people. We were educators making contributions to the dance, honoring and valuing the deeply held beliefs, that made the possibilities come alive, as we created, developed and composed our process for capturing the spirit of student learning, a story of their ongoing learning...a portfolio...a story...a dance.

"Today was a special celebration day in our classroom. We were getting ready to share our portfolios with our parents. I flipped back to the beginning of my binder and was amazed with a picture that I saw. It was me, in Kindergarten, with my big buddy from the year 5/6 class. I had forgotten all about the fun times we had in the gym and outside for recess. I remembered how important that was to me, and smiled because I have a little buddy now, who looks up to me...I hope that I help her as much as my big buddy helped me."

"It was really interesting to look at all of my work and the projects that I had been involved in, over my years at school. I remembered doing a science experiment at the play park. We were learning all about inclined planes and spirals. Did you know that I used some of the same stuff when I tried to invent a

different kind of board game for my novel study?"

"What really made today special was that I got to talk about what I was learning at school. My parents, teacher and friends all listened and agreed that I had learned lots of cool stuff."

"I have to think of a goal to select for my next challenge... sometimes that's hard, but my teacher helps me. I have so many memories of school, like the time we watched the butterflies emerge from the chrysalis, some of them actually escaped out into the school!" (Stories from children, Nov. 96)

The rain has stopped and I can only see slight traces that have been left behind by the dancing raindrops on the windowpane.

Hope is the window through which I observe the world around me and my moral imagination is how I make sense and compose the dance that forms my story of school. "Hope happens in the space between" (Jevne, 1989, p. 135) ...a space between being and knowing.

As I continue to look out the window I am in that space between, like the overlapping of the seasons, as I come to an understanding that just as there is a rhythm to the raindrops, there is a rhythm to my spirit, to my imagination. It is this rhythm and the limits that I hold in my heart, mind and soul that create the continually unfolding dance that tells my story of Bisset School and how I came to be shaped by that dance within

the hopes, dreams, experience and understandings of my moral imagination. And I wonder...

There are no starting points, only cycles and circles, ritual and repetition, and yet there is a fluidity that brings change and newness, from the known to the unknown and back to that which is known. It is a beginning. It is a story. It is spring.

IMPROVISATION...THE DANCE UNFOLDS

It is a Time in Which

It is a time in which...the morning is still and quiet. There is no breeze ruffling the newly leafing trees. The lake is clear, as clear as glass. The only sounds are the sounds of the birds, the lake birds and the birds of the bush, accompanied by a frog symphony playing from the nearby ditches. The haunting, lonely calls of the loons are blending with the lyrical trill of the robins, as they look for twigs and grass to make their homes. I pause in my walk to admire the lake. It has been a week since the ice shivered off and yet this morning seemingly there is still no motion. From the top of the hill I cannot detect the quiet, gentle lapping of the waves on the sand. What captures my attention is the reflection in the mirror-like surface of the lake itself. I can see the soft blue sky and the wispy white clouds. I can make out the dark green of the evergreens ringing the far side of the lake, with the mint green color of the new leaves adding a complimentary tone to the reflection in the deep green water. I notice an osprey, circling high above the lake looking for her breakfast. In the reflection she is just a small black dot growing bigger as her eye catches the slivery flash of the minnows. She dives and her catch is successful, sending a pattern of ever increasing ripples skimming over the surface of the lake, disrupting and changing momentarily or perhaps forever the reflection in the 'mirror'. Her graceful movements, flowing

effortlessly with the unseen air currents until just the right moment when her rapid descent begins. She adds her dance to the overall harmony of the reflected image. Her contribution has added a sense of contrast and meaning supported by the whole moment etched in my mind. The tone is one of tranquillity and peace in concert with the world at the lake. As I continue with my walk, I think about tone and the importance that tone has for me as a dancer and as a choreographer sensitive to the interpretations of the world around me. I think about how tone is also very important for me as a school principal. I think about the ways in which tone shapes and is shaped by my practices.

Tone of the Dance

Tone for the artist is the addition of black to the primary colors, a depth, a feeling, and a way for the artist to craft a mood for each color on the palette, as the brush strokes bring the canvas to life. Music is filled with tone, half tones, and semi tones, which resonate between the whole tones on a harmonic scale lingering in the air after the musician has paused. As a dancer, tone is what I strive for. As a principal, tone encompasses what I strive for. It is a time in which...

I Love to Come to School

"I love to come to school. This school makes my heart feel at home. I'm somebody here and I know that I'll continue to be somebody special."

"When I get to school there is always a cheery 'Good Morning' or 'Hi! How are you today?' I'm noticed. The big people don't just walk by busy with their own thoughts. When I've been away everyone, not just my closest friends, are happy to see me and welcome me back. It's nice to know that I've been missed. That's how I know I'm special."

"Everyone knows my name and that I love horses. I get chances to do research about horses and then make my reports on the television network in the school. My current science experiment is about the different variety of riding hats available and which is the most effective if you fall off your horse. It's really cool. The teachers ask me about my riding and all about my horse."

"I love coming to school!" (Stories from children, Nov. 96)

Tone includes all of the motions and movements between any two specific positions. It is the way that the movement feels, the space that it fills, and the timing that controls the tempo, as my arm gracefully with gentleness or angularity with abruptness, moves through a port de bras, from second position to fourth en avant. Tone for a dancer is always in relationship; to the tempo, to the timing, to the other dancers, to the image that the dancer or choreographer is attempting to convey. Often tone is the invisible line, noticed on the periphery of our perception, inherent in the alignment of my turned head with the stretched point of my foot. It is the way in which my foot and my head arrive at their rendezvous, with

everything working together, in relationship, which creates the fluidity of tone. In a dance the tone is taken for granted when everything is developing together, as it must, to communicate the image at the heart of the dance. When 'something' is out of place, and the words are not easily found to describe why, it could be that the tone is unclear, or out of synchronization with the elements of the dance. When this does happen the invisible or the intangible elements that are needed to compose the tone; the spaces with the positions, the feeling with the timing, or the balance with the movement, provide little unity within the dance, and the overall tone is affected. The dance no longer captures the imagination. The elements are not working together. When a dancer has danced, the only thing which remains of the performance is the length of time it will live in the minds of those who saw it...this space is created and lives in our imaginations because of the artistry which created the tone for the entire dance. As a dancer I strive to live within the tone created by the dance as it unfolds linking imagination with the shape and sequence of my movements. As a principal, as a learner, and as a mother, the tone created by my unfolding life gives meaning and purpose to my practices. It is a time in which...

I marvel at the tone created by the unfolding day as I watch the emerging patterns, movements, sights, sound, and time, blending together to create the tranquillity and peace that I feel in my soul. The dance of the osprey will last a long time etched in my memory.

Reflections

My hand rests gently on Jimmy's shoulder as Sandy and I stand in the school library engaged in a conversation. "Should I stop doing Kite Night? Is it too much to expect the Dads to come? The turnout wasn't as good as it has been some years. All of the children and their Dads, who came, had a great time and really enjoyed the opportunity to take part in a small piece of their child's school life. We did have a lot of fun. All the kites flew! But what about all of the people who didn't come?"

"Sandy, I know that you and Marvey certainly don't need one more night out, but it's an important evening for me and it was for Jimmy when he was with you."

"Why? Are the children and their families still experiencing what we intended?"

"Well, what's our purpose? What are the beliefs that we are attempting to reflect by inviting the parents to become involved in this way? Do we need to set it up differently? Do we need to be more explicit about our intentions and about the importance that this holds for children in the wider perspective of their school lives? It's still an important thought for me to keep considering. It gives the children something to look forward to, to anticipate, and to hang on to, within their week. Is it still relevant for you and for what you believe is important for

learning and for the children in your classroom?" It is a time in which...

Our conversation reflects the connections that weave and flow between our beliefs and practices. We want to understand and create an understanding for a whole complex sequence of what is important in the lives of children. How do we as educators, who work with children and their families, define and explore this wider, broader, context? How do we breathe life into an experience so that it can find its place in concert with the patterns of the whole dance? How do we keep the purpose for doing things alive, even if the cadence itself changes, evolves, grows and is replaced with new steps, still representing the overall purpose for shaping the dance? Where do we begin to help parents understand that coming to Kite Night is much bigger than the evening itself. It is not just one more thing for them to do in their busy complicated lives, but something that provides memories and whole contexts for their children's understanding that they are important little people with ways to contribute to their world? More importantly though, what is it that allows Sandy and me to have this conversation, to ask these questions and to explore a range and variety of ways to act upon these questions? It is a time in which...

"Jimmy, it's time for you to go to class." I tousle his hair and return his hug. I'll see you in a little while. I smile as I watch

him skip hand in hand with his friend down the hallway to his classroom. These are such important times. These are such important conversations that help to frame the ways in which we choose to think about, to act on, to understand our practice as teachers, as principals, and as parents. It is a time in which...

How do I respond and choreograph the ways in which I answer questions and challenge or solve the problems that are inherent in a school, a community, and a place where people come together? I am supportive of people's learning. The school is my teacher. I listen and notice the tone of the school as the rhythm and inspiration for my dance.

At the ballet when the audience knows the story to be danced they will anticipate the tone associated with each scene and character. They will want to get involved, to be transported along, their attention focused where the dancers and choreographer designed it to be. If the audience doesn't understand or know the idea, concept, or image of the dance composition then their attention turns to other elements of the performance. "Poor transitions, for example, draw attention to the structure, design, and technical skill of the choreographer or of the dancers rather that allowing the audience to focus on the overall feeling or form of the work as a whole" (Minton, 1989, p. 72). The dancing is still admired but as isolated fragments. "Look at the height of that jump! Did you count the number of

revolutions in that pirouette? Can you imagine the strength required to do that move?" Kite Night, by itself in isolation, has importance, but it is the tone that gives it relevance and meaning within the whole composition. It is that which gives Sandy and me the motivation and confidence to ask the questions, to have the conversation, and to feel free to experiment...to improvise another pattern.

I value the image in my being, reflected in the lake with the ripples adding a moment of uncertainty, an opportunity to learn, as I figure out the unpredictability caused by the movements of the osprey's dance and the reflection in the dark green water.

Sandy is interrupted by her little people and I feel the bubbling excitement and anticipation that their faces and sparkling eyes show as they greet her with stories, hugs and treasures that they have brought as contributions to their day. Sandy and I nod a goodbye and comment that we need to think more about our conversation and to continue this discussion...a ripple on the surface as we continue to learn about the possibilities.

Reflected in the mirror image of the lake is the surrounding countryside, the tone of that moment, the quiet calmness triggered by the image in my mind, is what is remembered in my being.

Tone is important in the everyday activities and moments of Bisset School. It is the tone that "calls us to join in the dance"

(Bateson, 1994, p. 10) and allows us to be who we are as learners involved in our own learning process within the complicated pattern of steps and dances that are reflective of learning.

It is the tone of our school that sets the stage for the ongoing and daily 'performance' of teaching and learning. Sometimes our teaching and learning are rehearsed, sometimes routine and still other times improvisational.

These dance forms create the tone, which creates the space and room to dance. Tone gives voice to the range of emotional responses held by the individual dancers when attempting their movements, especially steps that are new and unfamiliar. It gives us the confidence to ask the questions which allows us to be both dancers and audience with the balance between these two identities fluctuating based on the rhythm of the dance itself. The reflection needed to understand these new and unfamiliar steps "interprets and sets the emotional tone" (Bateson, 1994, p. 3) that helps each of us to "figure out who to be and how to react" (p. 7). Tone is the "line stretching" (Klein, 1971, p. 771), connecting the movements of the dancers into a wholeness that can be felt if not always understood in each exact moment.

It is the feeling left in the air after the reflection in the mirrored surface of the lake changes bringing appreciation to the dance and

understanding to the ripples caused by the silver flash of the minnow and the graceful dance of the osprey.

Tone provides the sense of timing, the flow and the enveloping spirit that adds depth and understanding to the learning, which is the inspiration for the unfolding dance. It allows for and recognizes the complimentary motions and the contrasting actions as a coming together rather than as a disjointed, random or unconnected movement. We come together as dancers to dance the story of school that is situated in our moral imaginations.

Dear Sue,

A Reflection

I see myself through the sun's brightness
An outline, my face staring at me.
The shape changes, other faces appear
Some stay longer, others fade quickly.
The clouds,
the shadows blend, the colors change.
I search to find the image
the ripples separate the shape.
The wind dies – calm
A new face, no the same face clearer
I see the eyes

New colors appear, the landscape changes,
Wind – Waves – Clouds
The face disappears. (Staff Response Journal, June 1994)

Go Spread Your Wings

Tone is so often an intangible element, hard to describe, but it is a necessary part of the dance routine that allows the sequence of steps to be united as one dance, even though different steps may be executed differently by different dancers; in solos, duets, trios or ensembles. It is still the one dance held together by the values and beliefs reflected in the practices of the dancers.

I don't always know all the steps before they become a woven pattern in the routine. Nor can I always pre-plan or predict all that we are going to do, for I am not one dancer alone, but one of many in the company. Teaching and learning, with dancing, are ways to communicate that we are, all that we hope to become, and the imagining that begins the improvisational process for performing our dance in concert with others. "We are called to join in a dance whose steps must be learned along the way, so it is important to attend and respond. Even in uncertainty, we are responsible for our steps" (Bateson, 1994, p. 10).

"I finished all of my math work before anyone else today. I was really proud of my efforts and being able to do that because I have to think really hard. Math isn't very easy for me. My teacher asked me what I had learned, and what I wanted to do next time to improve my problem solving. This is what we call reflecting. I thought and I thought. I would like a question where I can use all of the things I'm learning...you know a real question."

He smiled. "What do you do every night when you're getting ready for bed?", he asked.

I replied a little hesitantly..."Hmmm, hmmm, I have a shower."

"Here is your question then. How much does it cost to take a hot shower?"

"I just stared at him, my mouth open just a little bit."

"I trust you. I know that you can figure it out. There is no right answer. I just made up that question." With a knowing look and a nod of his head that was all that he said.

"At first I had no idea where to begin, but I remembered his faith in me. I saw in my mind his knowing face smiling and his head nodding. I began by drawing a picture of the water pipes in the house. I spent many hours on that problem. "*You know what?*" He had another question ready for me...

"How much of the world is covered in snow in January?"

"I just laughed right out loud!" (Stories from children, Nov. - 96)

It is the tone in a school that allows us to respond, to explore, to risk, and to make sense of our worlds. What can be more uncertain than the unfolding of individual lives as they learn to dance with others within the limits provided in a collective moral imagination? Imagination is my way of beginning a conversation, and of giving voice to possibilities. Improvisation is my way of capturing these possibilities and learning their range and potential as I balance the roles of dancer, choreographer, and audience within the scope of the overall dance.

Dear Sue,

<u>Go Spread Your Wings</u>

Test the waters,

I'm here if you need me.

I flew high - fast - free -

The sky so blue, so open.

I forgot about the wind.

I knew it would be there.

I had to come down.

You listened - You knew

Try this.

I flew again

the wind was still there,
but this time I kept going.
It felt good - It worked.
I knew I could turn back
when I wanted to,
if the wind shifted or I felt tired.
Right now I was soaring. (Staff Response Journal, June 1994)

Improvisation as an Art Form

"Action always signifies a new beginning, a new initiative, so that fixed and final frameworks remain inconceivable" (Greene, 1995, p. 197). Improvisation is a form of participation, a way to move along the dance and to make sense of the performance. It provides me with a framework for future learning. Each image has different meanings and is seen from different perspectives. "Mostly we are unawares of creating anything new, yet both perception and action are necessarily creative (Bateson, 1994, p. 6). Improvisation is a way I hold an image in my mind while connecting present learning with those moments of awareness, insight and spontaneity that lead to exploration, discovery and continued learning. I am able to realize and recognize the potential of continuing the improvisational moment until the actions find a place in the

dance...a ripple on the surface of the lake forever changing the reflected image in my mind. "Men and women confronting change are never fully prepared for the demands of the moment, but they are strengthened to meet uncertainty if they can claim a history of improvisation and a habit of reflection" (Bateson, 1994, p. 6).

Both the dancer and the choreographer use improvisation as an art form. Change in a dance always involves a restructuring phase, a moment of conceptual chaos (Minton, 1986). As a dancer-choreographer I see a series of images before I dance a single step. My personal beliefs and values fit within the stories of school which are situated and have a place within the broader context of the world in which we as a school community live.

The dance of the osprey high in the sky circling, watching and diving, a part of my memory linking the reflection in the lake, the rhythmic movement of the ripples within the lake to my lived experience in that world.

Journal Writing

"The snack tonight is great! Who made the nachos? That's a wonderful punch!"

"Did everyone bring their journals with them today? If you didn't, would you please take a minute while we're still getting organized to go and get them? If you can't instantly find them, a

section of your portfolio would work too! Thanks everyone!!"

"I'd like to begin our meeting today with some journaling, a chance to think, to write and to share what we know about teaching and learning. More than ever we need to keep in mind what we believe is best for children. I'd like us to talk about and to write about, why we think our practices are reflective of our learning and teaching processes. There are so many changes in the air, all of which will affect the funding that comes to our school. Specifically, we will be getting less money from the government to operate. The government may also be placing requirements on the way in which our services are offered. I want to make sure that the decisions that are still in our control to decide do reflect our beliefs, values, experiences and knowledge about children as learners, about ourselves as learners. I don't think it's all gloom and doom though, and this may be the opportunity we need to try some of our ideas and to take a look at the ways in which we are currently organized. Does the organization that we have support what we do in our day to day work? Let's ask ourselves some of the hard questions surrounding our practices and the structures that we have in place. Are there some things that we could change or do differently? Are we taking advantage of the skills and gifts that each of us has to offer? Do we know and remember why we do what we do? It will become increasingly important to

articulate our beliefs, so our parents and our children will also know and understand the new initiatives as we begin to think and to talk about them. We need to be able to understand a common language as we make sense of the world around us. So, in our journals let's write about those things that we do believe and the practices that are successful because they are important to who we are as a school community. This will begin to form the fluid threads as we continue to shape the story of our work together. It is a time in which. . . ."

Improvisation is a joining of technical expertise, which is the vehicle for conveying information about shape and alignment, rhythm and musicality, space and direction, weight and flow, and quality and initiation, with experiences, images and imagination within the art form involved (Minton, 1986). As a dancer-choreographer in the school I use improvisation to create an environment and tone so that each dancer may develop an infinite variety of options for dealing with a given moment in time. I must be open and awake to glimpse the specialness and uniqueness shown through each dancer's interpretation of the essence of the dance.

Faith, Trust, Responsibility

Dear Sue,

Faith, Trust, Responsibility

diving, flying
running, walking,
-watching
rolling, crawling
bumping crashing.
-listening
floating, sinking
lying, resting,
-supporting
trial, error
knowing, learning,
- understanding
observing, exploring
experimenting, discovering,
- sharing
My own pace." (Staff Response Journal, June 1994)

I must know and use my art to link each of these movement phrases to other movements. I must recognize and realize what the timing is in order to decide if the particular movement sequence, however brilliant, fits the tone that is needed to have a cohesive work in progress. It is a process of fitting together each part that is essential to the whole, whole which is continually unfolding and evolving like the ripples on the lake as we continue to learn about teaching and learning as a

school community. I endeavor with my presence in the dance to create an awareness of this relationship for all of us as dancers composing our dance.

The osprey with the minnows, the clear blue sky with the wispy white clouds and the ripples increasing in size and slowing in intensity as they ring and hold for a moment the action of the osprey.

It requires the ability to choose a beginning, middle and end that relate in form and feeling to the whole dance. This is like being a story teller who is able to catch the moments of value and tell and retell and shape and reshape the story until the imagined becomes a piece of history molding the movements to fit the forms and images emerging from the present dance. Dance must be remembered through images in the mind so that each picture adds up to become the remembered images forming the whole dance (Ambrose, 1953, p. 7). "The purpose here is to discover grace and meaning in a picture larger still" (Bateson, 1989, p. 211). "The compositions we create in these times of change are filled with interlocking messages of our commitments and decisions. Each one is a message of possibility" (p. 241).

The Salamander Room

"Brr brr, is it ever cold outside today. This is a great day to have a P.D. day. The children can stay at home and be warm

and cozy, while we can use this opportunity to dream and make our dreamcatchers. I have a wonderful story that will be a great introduction for our day and a beautiful story so we may treasure our dreamcatchers as a reminder of the hope that we hold for the future. As we spend our day thinking of the elements we're planning for our re-structuring, let's also think about the processes for imagining the possibilities, that we hold in our hopes and dreams. As I read the story, The Salamander Room, let's think about all the questions that we want to ask and the ways that we may create for discovering, exploring and probing the depth inherent in those questions. How are we going to make sense of the changing world around us? How are we going to organize so that our kindergarten program is not lost entirely? How are we going to keep alive the fine arts in our programming? Are there other ways that we can provide release time and planning time so that time is an integral part of our work together? Are there concepts that can be taught in smaller groupings, larger groupings? How do we give our children a sense of community and continuity? How do we find out in what ways our children are smart? How will we continue to give children the opportunities that they need to demonstrate and take responsibility for their learning? How are we all going to continue to feel successful and to make contributions to the world that we are creating? It is a time in which..."*Brian found a*

salamander in the woods. It was a little orange salamander that crawled through the dried leaves of the forest floor. The salamander was warm and cozy in the boy's hand." "Come live with me," Brian said. He took the salamander home.

"Where will he sleep?" his mother asked.

"I will make him a salamander bed to sleep in. I will cover him with leaves that are fresh and green, and bring moss that looks like little stars to be a pillow for his head. I will bring crickets to sing him to sleep and bullfrogs to tell him good-night stories."

"And when he wakes up, where will he play?". . . " (Mazer, 1991, pp.1-5).

Teachers, as dancers using improvisation, hone the ability to identify what works for them. Complexity for every situation is woven in space and time. (Bateson, 1989). Teachers must be free to mold these new movements into a dance. Dancers, like the staff at Bisset, feel a need to be involved in the decisions which clarify what they are trying to project and the intent of the movement sequence.

"It is really important to me that each classroom, as a learning environment, be reflective of the teacher and the children who are making sense from the learning experiences happening within. We need to talk with each other so that these experiences can be reflective of all that we do within our story of

school." (Letter to staff, June 1993).

Story Writing

"I love writing stories and so does my teacher. She shares her writing with us all of the time. When I listen to her talk about her writing, I know that if I don't get it right the first time, that it's okay because most good writers don't. To be good at writing we need to write and write and write. I want to be good writer. Some day I am going to write children's stories, like my "*A. B. C. Book*" that I've already written for the Year 1/2s. My teacher says that reading will also help my writing. I love it when she reads us stories. I especially like the stories where I can draw pictures in my head while the words tell the action parts. My favorite books are about sports or fantasy."

"I think that my teacher has great curiosity. She really wants me to want to learn. She says I need to know what I want to learn about...what is important to me. My teacher says she wants me to learn throughout my whole life, just like she is still learning about being a better writer."

"My teacher says curiosity is a great thing to have inside of ourselves. I guess that is where questions come from. There is never just one way, but lots of ways to find out about ideas. My teacher gives me lots of ways to write and that's important to me. I want to be a writer." (Stories from children, Nov. 96).

The intent is the shaping and forming process, which motivates and helps each of us as dancers to become involved with and to communicate the images that hold the dance together. The communication and conversation around these ideas and thoughts are essential when delving into the essence of a situation. Each of us as a dancer "learns to combine and vary familiar components to do something new to fit a particular context and evoke a particular response, sometimes something of very great beauty or significance but always improvisational and always adaptive" (Bateson, 1989, p.3).

Science Worlds

"Let's think about our science programming and what we know about the ways in which children make sense out of the world around them. I really think that the way children intuitively construct meaning and reflect what they already know and are trying to figure out is exciting to watch. The children have a lot of opportunity to explore and to create through reading, writing and child-centered activities, within the arts, social studies and language arts. Are we now ready to turn our attention towards science? Can we incorporate more of these ideas into the designing of our science programs? What are we doing now? What do we know? What will support our exploration? It is a time in which. . . ."

When I use improvisation I use an experience to begin an exploration. I let the experience unfold in it's own time. "There is always something in the past to work with . . . reshaping and reinterpreting . . . responding to multiple needs" (Bateson, 1989, pp. 236-8).

Standing and watching as the osprey adds her own rhythm to the unfolding sequence seen in that captured moment at the lake. The ripples are transforming the clear surface of the reflective image in the lake to a pulsating moment alive with the beauty of a sequence in motion.

Constant transformations are taking place as a newly discovered connection seems like a revelation. "All living things are connected and all living things change and grow." (Nagrin, 1994, p. 15). My moral imagination and the sights, sounds, and feelings held there, initiate improvisations that may lead to a structured dance. It is a way of making something up, and changing it as necessary, a way of beginning. "The arts of improvisation involve recombining partly familiar materials in new ways, often in ways especially sensitive to context, interaction and response" (Bateson, 1989, p. 2). Dancing is never static, it is always in motion, and it is always changing. When dancing with others, response is essential for both the continuity of the tone and for the range of new adaptations and innovations possible. These improvisations are made possible because the tone values the interaction, response and learning

that is necessary to create them.

"Why don't we draw our new science themes from the world as seen through the eyes of children? We want the children to see science as relevant and meaningful to their lives so let's start with the worlds that are the most common in their daily lives."

"How will this work fit with the work that is being done with math worlds?" asked Mark. "Is there a connection that can be made?" Sherryl wondered. "Is there a link that should be made?" Marlene posed. "Do we want to keep it separate or blend the work as a way to begin?" Peggy wondered.

"I would like to see these as school-wide themes so that all of the children can be working on different aspects of the same theme at the same time," suggested Maureen. "What would happen if we designed science units that spanned a K-6 interest and ability level?" wondered Sandy. "What about buddy times and ways to have multi-age activities as part of each theme?" Gerry asked. "What common or consistent threads might connect these units? Our teaching and our learning?" Monica wondered.

"Let's work in groups with someone from each year level as a part of each planning group," suggested Sandy. "At staff meetings we can then share our work and help everyone become familiar with each of the units prior to introducing them

to the children." said Maureen. "Part of the work that the teams might do is to get all of the supplies and materials organized for the school", commented Deb.

"We'll each design one Science World to offer and contribute to the whole school. I wonder if each team should choose the World that they would be interested in exploring? It was a time in which...the forest, the play park, the classroom, the circus, and the garden became the worlds of science that wove a spirit of collaboration, improvisation, and shared meaning throughout our school community.

> Learning to savor the vertigo of doing without answers or making do with fragmentary ones opens up the pleasures of recognizing and playing within multiplicity. Improvisation and new learning are not private processes; they are shared with others at every age. (Bateson, 1995, p. 10)

Within the improvisation, I was able to support the dancers with their interpretations of the dance, fitting the movements together and making sense of the new relationships and rhythms created. Together we rehearsed those ideas that worked for us, left other thoughts until the timing called them to our memories, and still other ideas were discarded completely as unmanageable within the space and time of the whole dance. Conversations, reflection, mindfulness, were the dancer's techniques that helped us to create a learning community. This was the image

at the heart of the dance.

The tone at Bisset School encouraged, supported and made possible our use of improvisation. This art of improvisation became a way to learn, to interact, to explore, to respond, and to discover as we continually reached for possibilities held within the moral imagination which connected the hearts, minds and souls of each of us, as educators composing our story of school. This way of practicing and modeling our beliefs was the intangible essence, the invisible line that shaped the tone itself. The tone of the school and the moments of improvisation allowed us to make sense of contrasting and complimentary ideas so that the diversity and multiplicity of perspectives were celebrated. We created a tradition of change allowing us to respond and react with integrity and passion, knowing that each contribution was honored and valued as part of the complexity of the relationships among knowing, being and becoming all that we could be, situated within the dance of time. It is a time in which...

THE DANCE COMPANY...LEARNING ABOUT COMMUNITY

I'm the One in Charge of Celebrations

> I'm the one in charge of celebrations...Last year I gave myself one hundred and eight celebrations—besides the ones that they close school for. I cannot get by with only a few. Friend, I'll tell you how it works. I keep a notebook and I write the date and then I write about the celebration. I'm very choosy over what goes in that book. It has to be something I plan to remember the rest of my life. You can tell what's worth a celebration because your heart will POUND and you'll feel like you're standing on top of a mountain and you'll catch your breath like you were breathing some new kind of air. (Baylor, 1986, pp. 2-3)

The spring sunshine has warmed the sand. It feels warm to my touch as I lightly trail my fingers through the grains of sand, unconsciously making intricate circles and connecting paths. I watch the waves gently lapping on the smooth and packed sand in front of me. They leave behind them, for a brief moment, a unique pattern which I glimpse and appreciate before it is washed away by yet another line of waves rhythmically rolling up upon the beach. The pattern is repeated each time with small variations, a dance performance that I accept into my soul. I see a family of sandpipers running with short zigzagging steps, just ahead of the wave line on their long legs and orange feet. The grebes just

beyond the breaking line seem like they too are dancing, but only for each other, a part of the larger dance of time as they search for floating material to build their nests. These homes once constructed will hold beautiful eggs and rock gently on the water near the shore, a reminder of the dance performed and its relationship to the continually unfolding patterns of this world. It is important to watch, to notice, to value, and to honor the elements of the moment that I find myself in, for the world around me is alive with the intricacies and complexities of relationship. I am a visitor to this world and if I take care in developing an understanding for and about the natural order of the steps in motion, I feel welcome here. "I'm the one in charge of celebrations" (Baylor, 1986, p. 2).

> Affirmation of life entails affirmation of repetition...just the repetition of feelings and events in ordinary life...always there is something emerging, something maturing, something fading, and something passing away...thus repetition is not mere repetition...but it represents opportunities to learn, to share, and to celebrate. (Noddings, 1984, p. 124-5)

The water is cold. It is a numbing cold, as I stretch my toes to feel the swell of a wave as it caresses the sand. The dance of the waves changes in response to my touch. I feel a part of this world as the sights and sounds of the lake wash over me. It is soothing and I am contemplative. My thoughts wander to a different time and another place, seemingly a million miles away.

My thoughts are about people and the way that they have touched my life. My thoughts are about those touches and how by accepting the touches into my soul I am learning about who I am. I, too, have touched their lives, in response to who they are, as we all learn to be a part of a world in relation.

This is how I fit into the world. This is like the world surrounding me now, the line of waves changing the pattern in response to my touch. My gentle touch changing, learning, knowing, experiencing the response of the waves. The grebes and the sandpipers are accepting my presence as a new rhythm in their dance. "I'm the one in charge of celebrations" (Baylor, 1986, p. 2). I feel small as I contemplate the universe from my place in the sand and think about the seemingly insignificant part that I dance in the evolution of time.

What is really important in the work that I do? What do I contribute to the flow and fluidity of this dance? What are the relationships and connections that link me to this larger world and yet provide me with the shared sense of meaning and understanding that motivates the dancing that I can contribute in concert with the others with whom I dance? I am experiencing the "joy of relation and the quest for understanding" (Noddings. 1984, p. 169) as I think about what is important in schools.

> I'm the one in charge of celebrations. . . . In that easy silent way that coyotes move, she pushed into the wind. I stood there hardly breathing, wishing I

> could move that way. I was surprised to see her stop and turn and look at me. She didn't hurry she wasn't afraid. I saw her eyes and she saw mine. That look held us together. (Baylor, 1986, pp. 13-14)

What is Really Important in Schools?

What is really important in schools? This is a question I have asked myself many times. We as teachers hold and touch the lives of children and their families. We need to honor this precious gift by searching for and finding the ways that give rise to all that each child can be. A couple of weeks ago I was reminded once again of the role schools play or can choose to play in the real lives of children. My story begins seven years ago...

My first memory of Atif was as a little boy, holding his mother's hand and looking expectantly for something to happen or for someone to tell him what he should be doing. It was the first day of school...a brand new school where the children were unknown—no personal histories to provide a sense of familiarity and no school traditions to provide a feeling of comfort. Our eyes met and I walked towards this dark-haired little soul. Atif was wearing a brand new white shirt (which I was to find out later was a financial sacrifice for his family), with a blue vest, blue bow tie and shiny black shoes.

"Good Morning. I'm sure glad that you're here because maybe you could help me. My name is Mrs. McKenzie. I'm new here too. I'd sure like to begin my day by saying that I know at least one person. What's your name? Would you like to come along with me? I think that together we can find the way to your teacher and your new school home."

I stretched out my hand and this shy little boy tentatively held my fingers and nodded gently. I turned to his Mom and indicated with a smile that she was welcome to come with us as this was, after all, her first day of school too. Atif and I chatted as we walked hand in hand down the hallway; at least I chatted while he listened, smiled and nodded from time to time. We arrived at his classroom and after introductions were completed I whispered to Atif "I'll wait for you tomorrow morning if you'd like to walk with me again." His eyes, a warm soft brown, glowed with delight. Atif and I began a relationship that day, one that was to last for many years.

How did I know that Atif needed this connection? How did I choose Atif from among the many children who were coming into the building that day? I don't know for sure, but my heart and my intuitive sense had spoken. Every morning for many weeks Atif and I walked down the hallway to his classroom, to his teacher and to his friends.

I discovered many insights in the complex world in which

Atif was living. His older brother was in Junior High at the time, and on his way to a brilliant academic school career—well praised and highly regarded by his parents and his extended family both here in Canada and at home in Pakistan. Atif unfortunately did not hold similar sway; quiet and thoughtful with a gentle heart, Atif stayed in the background of his family's life. His Dad was very ill and undergoing treatments for cancer. Atif's Mom was spending her time, energy and tears making many adjustments, the least of which were a new country, a new culture and a new role within her family. Atif, through the knowing eyes of a seven-year-old boy, understood that the safe place in his world was to be found within the walls and within the circle of the caring people at school. School was an important place for him, he cared deeply about it and the people who were a part of this world.

I believe that Atif grew and blossomed at school. He gained confidence in who he was as a learner and made valuable contributions to our school community. There was a smile in my heart and a tear in my eye when he moved on to Junior High. I hoped with all of my being that Atif would continue to find another safe haven in his new school, that his new school would become the school home that Bisset was. I was reassured many times over the next year as Atif regularly came back to visit and to maintain the relationship that was important

to both of us.

This summer, I received a terrible phone call. Atif was visiting Pakistan with his family. They were in a busy market place in a town near the Afghan border. There was a series of explosions. Atif disappeared that day. Under the confusing circumstances of that horrible event I can only hope that Atif did die in the explosions and is not facing some of the other possible fates that his family now fear. His family is not returning to Canada, as they are reluctant to give up the hope of finding out for sure what happened that day in the marketplace.

In my heart I know that I made a difference in Atif's life. I was true to myself, I gave of myself and I believed in his ability to be who he could be. Atif made a difference in my life. He cared for me as we shaped the connections that helped us both make sense of the world. I will never forget those smiling brown eyes, the gentle heart and the little boy to whom they belonged. (My Response Journal, August 1996).

Relationships

I think about the people at Bisset and the relationships, the connections that we have developed with one another like dancers exploring the range of ideas that give substance to our work together. I think about the world that each of us defines for ourselves, our contributions to those worlds and the success

that we feel as we continually explore and discover ourselves in relation to each other in those worlds. I think about the beliefs that we hold and the ways in which our collective practices represent those beliefs. These beliefs and values are not just about teaching and learning but about life itself, and our place within the universe that holds us all. "I'm the one in charge of celebrations" (Baylor, 1986, p.2).

"Community, like the sacred, is an idea that becomes reality because we believe in it . . . "(Bateson, 1994, p. 42).

Trust

I had been thinking out loud trying to recall the details of a memory. I was trying to figure out when we as a staff actually began the practice of writing cards and notes of appreciation, thanks to one another and to other people associated with our school community. We wanted to acknowledge and to model a belief about the importance of writing to those who had contributed in some small way to our day to day lives. This practice expanded as we also began to include other life happenings such as births, marriages, anniversaries, birthdays, hospital stays, deaths and achievements for staff, their families, and the other significant people in the Bisset story of school. It became very important to us that people and all that they were doing in their lives were celebrated, noticed, honored and

valued. Where did this practice begin?

It began, like so many other threads in our story, with a conversation. This one happened in the 'temporary' kindergarten room, before our move to our own school home. The conversation flowed around the topic about what a wonderful feeling it was to receive a note of thanks from a child, a parent, a friend, or a colleague. The written word was a powerful way to help us realize that what we were doing was worthwhile and meaningful...especially when someone else noticed and cared enough to put thoughts down on paper. It was an affirmation that we were a part of a relationship that mattered.

"The art of writing thank-you notes seems to be a lost art in today's busy world!"

"You know, I remember as a child, sitting down with my mother to write notes right after my birthday and again at Christmas time. I don't do that anymore! I certainly don't insist that my kids do it! I wonder why?"

"That's the same for me. I don't receive very many notes any more, either."

"I also remember having lots of paper and pens and felts and crayons available on the table for my children, so that writing could happen as a part of their play."

"Why don't we consciously try to write more thank-you

notes. Do you want to try? It sure is nice to receive them and it helps me to remember the event, person, or situation referenced in the card. It's another link, like you were talking about, another way to model a belief through a practice!"

"So, let's involve our children and their parents, too! Let's tell them why it is important to do this; to acknowledge, to affirm and to recognize that day to day happenings create relationships and memories to hold on to."

So it began.

This practice is one of the essential dance steps through which we acknowledge, confirm and nourish the relationships that are a part of the story of Bisset School. As we compose our practices that reflect who we are as dancers, learning to sense and accept the gifts from each other, a relation of trust and caring wove its way as a rhythm throughout every dance number. This rhythm became a trademark for our dance company. It helps us to give expression to the individual passions that we each hold for our craft and direct the ways in which we continue to enhance and expand this foundation of trust, together. Being in relation starts with the "construction of trusting relationships and works continually to build on the foundation of trust. There is a need for continuity of place, people and purpose" (Noddings, 1994, p. xii).

Tears roll down my cheeks, my eyes begin to burn and a heartfelt sigh leaves my soul. I blink away the tears and swallow as I think about what made the difference in my life within the world defined as Bisset School. What is it that I miss now that I am away from that world? As I think about myself in relationship with the world, I sit and watch the waves and feel the warmth of the sand.

For me the people of Bisset School are the ones who stand out, as the heart and soul of everything that we did and shared together. They are the ones that I miss the most as I take my walk onwards, never without them, as they are each now a part of my story.

Trust is a very powerful word when I try to describe the learning community that I was a part of at Bisset School. Our learning as teachers, as people, who touched the lives of children happened in a place that supported and acknowledged the risk to self that true learning sometimes requires. This support grew like a seed planted at our very first staff meeting before we had the opportunity to know each other very well. Mark remembers being amazed when as part of our activities for the day I asked the staff what they believed about teaching and learning and the best educational practices for the teaching of children. What sticks in Mark's mind is that he had never been asked that question before. At first, he replied tentatively waiting to hear and see what the others would say. A realization, like a

newly discovered gem, sparkled for him when he realized that not only was he being listened to but that his ideas were actually being written down on paper, to eventually be incorporated into the first philosophy statement that we developed as a group.

This had a profound impact on Mark's thinking and the level of personal commitment that he felt towards doing the very best work that he knew how to do grew from that moment. Right from the beginning I trusted their ways of knowing. I believed in who they were as teachers, and had demonstrated my faith in them as people, each of whom had contributions and gifts to share. I did this by trusting them to 'know' what to do when reaching out to children. This was important to me because I wanted to know them as learners, as teachers, and as people with whom I was going to share my time, ideas, passions, and dreams (My Response Journal, 1994).

"Caring and commitment are what make persons, and persons in turn reach out for community. Personhood arises from a long process of welcoming closeness and continues to grow and require nourishment over a lifetime of participation" (Bateson, 1994, p. 62).

The Milkman

Marlene has a faceless relationship with her milkman.

This is quite a common situation for many people who provide door-to-door milk service. She has had the same milkman delivering milk to her house, at 4:00 in the morning, several times a week for the last ten years. She has never seen the man himself, and only knew his name because of the signed receipt he left as the acknowledgment for payment.

One day as she was reading the paper she noticed an obituary for a man with the same last name as that of her milkman. This caught her eye and after reading the whole notice, Marlene discovered that this was her milkman's brother. The funeral service was to be held on Wednesday and Marlene's next milk delivery day was the following Tuesday. On the bottom of the paper ordering next weeks milk, Marlene wrote: "I was very sorry to read about the death of your brother. I wish to share with you how sorry I am for your loss." Marlene didn't think anything more of it, until several days later when along with her milk, she found a note addressed to her.

"Mrs. Peterson, thank-you very much for your note and your thoughts. It has been very hard for me this past little while, trying to keep everything the same, knowing that for me it never will be the same. I didn't think that any of my customers knew because I have actually met very few of them. It does make my workday a little easier knowing that someone knows. Thank-you. Your words meant a lot to me."

This same milkman was to also lose his father some months later which Marlene also acknowledged with a card.

Marlene, as she shared this story with me, reflected that she might not have reached out to her milkman had it not been for all of the support, acceptance and caring that she had received over the years as a part of Bisset School.

"We have moved through our day as dancers, not needing to touch more than lightly because we were instinctively moving to the same rhythm" (Lindbergh, 1955, p. 104). We cared about each other as individual people who were essential to the process of becoming all that we could be. The sense of space, shelter and belonging to something that was bigger than ourselves as individuals gave us images of being together in concert with the possibilities for the future. This was our way to be who we were. "I'm the one in charge of celebrations" (Baylor, 1986, p. 2).

"Open spaces
Safe and sheltered places
Room to grow" (Staff Response Journal, 1994)

Company of Dancers

We shared with each other the feelings, the conflicts, the hopes, and ideas that influenced our movements. We made space to talk about what motivated and touched us. We were

learning and caring about ourselves and about each other. This caring for self, the self that is situated within our moral imaginations, can emerge only from a caring about others (Noddings, 1984). In our own way we were like a company of dancers, contributing a sense of caring for the company, the work of the company, as the company learned to care about the individuals who were the company. A sense of belonging and of being cared about provided a theme of continuity and unity within a company which balanced a shared sense of purpose within a dance that honored and celebrated individual contributions to the composition. We were companions who as part of the company chose to break and eat "bread together" (Klein, 1971, p. 153).

"I'm the one in charge of celebrations. The dust devils started to gather. You could see that they were giants. You'd swear they were calling their friends to come too. And they came dancing in time to their own windy music" (Baylor, 1986, p. 5).

Feeling at home here on the beach soothes my soul. I understand the relationship, however momentary, with the water, the sun, the sand and the birds. I have a place here at the lake. I feel at home. I have a history where I have learned to watch, to listen, to know, to feel, and to sense the motions and the rhythm of the world around me. It is an image

that I hold deep within myself. "I'm the one in charge of celebrations" (Baylor, 1986, p. 2).

Memories to Keep

"I was feeling sad and thoughtful today. One of the other children in the school died in a terrible car accident. I didn't know him very well, but I was sad because everyone else in the school was feeling quite blue. We talked quietly and our teacher answered all of our questions. We shared some stories and we shared our own experiences with the death of someone close to us. I shared about my Grandfather's death and how my Dad cried and cried. I don't have very many memories of my Grandfather, but my Dad said such beautiful words about the memories he had, of spending time with his Father, that they have become my memories too. Dad talked about the times that he remembers: walking in the creek at the bottom of the ravine and getting cold water rushing over the tops of his boots; walking in the meadows and naming every plant they saw and every bird they heard; taking his Dad's hand as they walked up the hill towards home. It was sad but I'm glad that I had those memories to share with the class. I know that I will have memories to keep in my safe place of times that I've spent with my Dad." (Stories from children, Nov. 1996)

"Caring is important in itself". We have to learn to dance

in an "intuitive or receptive mode that is somewhat mysterious, internal and nonsequential" (Noddings, 1984, p. 7). It calls into play all that we are as dancers joining the dance. Caring within a relationship, which connects us to the dance, is the intricate balance between being and doing. It is an attitude that is "embedded in a relationship...that warms and comforts" (Noddings, p. 19) creating the touch felt by the dancers within the dance. "We must be given opportunities to choose ourselves as persons of integrity, persons who care" (Greene, 1995, p. 127).

> A good relationship has a pattern like a dance and is built on some of the same rules. The partners do not need to hold on tightly, because they move confidently in the same pattern, intricate but gay and swift and free like a country-dance of Mozart's. To touch heavily would be to arrest the pattern and freeze the movement, to check the endless changing beauty of its unfolding. There is no place here for the possessive clutch, the clinging arm, and the heavy hand; only the barest touch in passing. Now arm in arm, now face to face, now back to back – it does not matter which. Because they know they are partners moving to the same rhythm, creating a pattern together, and being invisibly nourished by it. (Lindbergh, 1955, p. 104)

Talking, listening, sharing and responding were the ways that we developed our worlds in relation to the people, ideas and

place that held importance to us as a company. "The purpose of dialogue is to come into contact with ideas, to understand, to meet each other, and to care" (Noddings, 1984, p. 186).

Remember When...?

Sharing, reflecting aloud, and ongoing conversation involve the kind of close contact in the common places within a school that make a "personal history valuable and this is important when we explore the possibility of caring in schools. A relationship is required. One must be able to say, 'Remember when...?' and elicit a response to that which does not need detailed explanation" (Noddings, 1984, p. 121).

"Sue, do you remember the morning that I came for an interview? I'll never forget the feeling that I had when I asked to see the Principal and around the corner you came dressed in your pajamas and a green elf hat. You introduced Peggy, who asked me if I wanted a cup of coffee...hazelnut, Irish cream or plain! We went into the conference room. A couple of minutes later Judy joined us. People clothed in their pajamas had never interviewed me before and I know that it will never happen again!"

"I remember our very first staff meeting in our new school. There was no furniture in the staff room. The construction workers were still around but the staff room had more or less

been completed. It was so exciting to actually be in the place that we had held in our minds for so long. We were sitting on the floor in a circle with our papers and a school diagram on our laps. We were trying to locate the classrooms and other spaces when you and Mel almost simultaneously discovered that all of his boxes had been labeled with the wrong room number! The punch and snack placed in the middle of our circle reminded me of a communal meal in a small village. Everything had that brand new smell, but already I was feeling at home and had tons of ideas about what to do with my new space. I left that meeting on cloud nine."

"Sue when you went to Baltimore it was sure fun to make our second 'official' school video... 'When the cat's away...' It was even more delightful when we shared it with you as a record of all the activities that we wanted you to believe that we were up to while you were away. Darcy sure enjoyed playing "principal" instead of his usual role of head custodian. I don't think that your office has ever been the same since!! 'The mice will play...'

"Remember the first time that the teacher's handbell choir met in the music room. Brenda had such patience to teach us the songs that we were going to play for our year end student celebration. Many of us couldn't even read the music and just had to count our way through the bars and the measures. We

did it though! It was such a great feeling and the children and their parents were sure surprised at our 'gift' to the Year Six students! We even sounded great and when the melody from My Favorite Things rang throughout the gym there were a lot of smiles."

"I will never forget our first Christmas in the wee little green room that we used as our general office. All of the children were safely aboard the buses. The buses had gone and, Sue, you called us into the office for a 'quick meeting' just before everyone left for their Christmas break. You mentioned that it was important and that everyone had to be there. When the last of us arrived, you laughed and said that Santa had made an early delivery. There were small bags for each of us. You and Judy had arranged 'festive coffee' complete with candy canes, whipping cream and cherries. The meeting was called so that we could be together one last time as a group before we went our separate ways. I looked around at the faces and consciously thought for the first time, 'I belong here with these people. We're a community working and learning together. We've made it! Here we are in a small, narrow, borrowed space, tired, but happy.' Then, with hugs and best wishes we said 'Merry Christmas everyone'. I'm glad that this is one tradition we have kept throughout the years. It's a wonderful celebration for the closing of the calendar year."

"Do you remember the staff talent show? I never laughed so hard in my life. It was my first 'official' introduction to the staff that I'd be joining in the fall. I was invited for lunch and entertainment on the second last day of the school year. The lunch was great, but the staff entertainers were memorable. 'Blondes just Wanna have Fun'...the blondes, the air guitar, the backup band, the singing, the dancing, and the laughter. Wow!"

"I remember being presented with my Bisset Teddy Bear. The idea of presenting bears when new staff is welcomed into the school community is marvelous. When I received my bear and a hug from Sue, I felt the Bisset magic. I felt connected to a past, to a tradition and yet I sensed the possibility for the future. The whole school just seemed to be different, alive with a sense of common commitment to children and learning. I love my bear and she sits on my desk as a reminder of all of the memories and thoughts that I have about the people that have touched my life here at Bisset School."

"I'm the one in charge of celebrations" (Baylor, 1986, p. 2).

Connections and a sense of personal history danced throughout the events that are remembered in the stories of Bisset School. These stories provide a sequence of movements that help each of us feel a sense of being at home and still of having a space of our own. We each had a "place to be apart and a time to come together" (Grifalconi, 1986, p. 27) to share

stories of the important happenings in our lives. In this way we were each "present in our acts of caring" (Noddings, 1984, p. 19) and could find places to feel alive within the dance and to be companions in the dance company. "We cannot separate education from personal experience. Who we are, to whom we are related, how we are situated all matter in what we learn, what we value," (Noddings, 1994, p.xiii) and how we view our individual worlds. The "how" of our dancing was embedded in who we were and it was the how and who in concert, which created the images for our dancing, that connected us and our ideas. Our times to come together, formally and spontaneously, were invitations to share of ourselves, strengthening the relationship with the other dancers and creating a sense of history and a feeling of family. Dancers before a performance often follow the same pattern for warm-up routines, wear their favorite shoes and/or a special or "lucky" pair of leg warmers. In this way there is a link between past performances and present endeavors. The individual dancers are placing themselves in a connected context within the whole company which helps to create that special magic of their art. These activities and/or objects become "tokens of continuity." "The wanderer or adventurer learns to finger a "lucky piece" along the way...so the same tattered reassurance of the familiar can be carried from place to place." These are "objects that provide a link with the

past...a way of feeling connected to something bigger and offering a way" of making sense and meaning while understanding the world in which they find themselves (Bateson, 1994, p. 85). "I'm the one in charge of celebrations." (Baylor, 1986).

They Stopped in a Good Place

Today is the day. It's not even noon yet and I'm experiencing so many different emotions. I'm tired, excited, nervous, thrilled, anxious, worried, and proud. I'm feeling like a new mother wanting to show off her baby's first smiles and delightful responses to a familiar caress on the cheek. Today we are celebrating at our school. We are having a party to tell the world that this is the beginning, the officially recorded beginning, of the life of Bisset School. We are forever marking this date, February 26,1990, as a day to remember and as a time to celebrate the life of this new school. At least this is my hope as I sit for a few minutes in the relative calm of my office and contemplate the day, the last six months and all that has happened in that time. Why is this day, this ceremony, so important to me? We have made this school building feel like home, a place where people come together and offer their own touch to the making of a story. This school is a safe and sheltered place where we are learning to recognize the gifts of others because it has become a part of lives. Our own

individual stories are weaving in and out of the stories of school providing connections and links to the past and future of our lives together. I know in my heart that we are celebrating not just the opening of a building, but the beginning life of a community—a life that, although it's new, has a history and a sense of place in our lives as the people who have let their lives shape this beginning of a vibrant community. We are celebrating and sharing with our "world" everything that we are and that we have accomplished in the last, or is it the first, six months together. Tonight we are saying this is who we are as a staff working with the children and families of Bisset School to create a sense of history, a sense of belonging, and a sense of hope for the future. As I sit in my blue chair and look out the window into the shades of pink and blue in the library and office area my eye rests on an oil painting. This was a gift from my family, honoring and recognizing my part in the creating of this new school. This painting, however, was much more than the present it represented, it also depicted a significant family story and a connection with my past. It is something that I will carry with me as I share the story with the others in my school community.

My Mom and Dad drove in from Calgary to attend, as my special guests, the official school opening. They arrived and, as always, there was a flurry of activity surrounding the unloading of

the car, the excited conversations, and the welcoming itself. I noticed that Dad had an interesting brown paper package under his arm. It was one that he wouldn't let me carry into the house for him. During the next little while, I momentarily forgot about the package, as Mom was very interested in seeing her wee grandson. There was some whispering in the kitchen as Dad and Neil, my husband, engaged in a private conversation while opening and pouring glasses of wine. Dad stopped the conversations and said that he had a toast to make and a present for the Principal of the brand new "state of the art" elementary school. I was just a little embarrassed and felt my cheeks getting warm as the attention in the room shifted to me. I gave Jimmy to his Grandmother and Dad handed me the package, gave me a hug and said that he was proud of me. Dad went on to explain however, that Bisset was not the first school that the McKenzie family had been involved in opening. I carefully unwrapped the package.

It was a gorgeous oil painting, set in the late fall with golden poplar trees surrounding a gray log structure. There were two children, a little boy and a little girl walking over a freshly harvested field carrying what I imagined to be their schoolbooks. They were walking towards a one-room schoolhouse. This schoolhouse was complete with a front porch, windows and a chimney. This wonderful gift was a

painting done from a sketch of the original schoolhouse that was built on my Great Grandfather's homestead in 1887. The two children were dressed in clothing typical of that period. The little girl was wearing a white cotton dress over brown stockings with her hair pulled back in a pony-tail tied with a white ribbon. The little boy was wearing brown homespun trousers with brown suspenders over a white cotton shirt. I just loved the picture and was gazing at it as Dad went on with his story. Dad had a sketch from a historical account enlarged so that my brother, who lives in Toronto, could paint this piece of the family story for me. The two children in the setting were actually my niece and nephew, Jacki and Tavis, depicted as if they might have been on their way to school after the fall harvest had been completed in the year 1887. There were no people in the original photograph, but my brother thought that it would be important to add this little bit of artistic license, just for me. I had not been expecting anything like this, although I should have known that my Dad, who is a very thoughtful person with a passion for family stories, would have had something up his sleeve.

Sitting now in my office, I think once again about the sense of history that my oil painting provides for me and how I am the connection between the two stories of school. The schoolhouse in my painting was built just over one hundred years before the school that I am now sitting in. Like many of the one-room schoolhouses of that time, the Brokenhead

School came to be because of the people in that farming community who felt that it was important to have a school for their children.

The Brokenhead School was built by three neighbors on a section of land on Great Grandfather's homestead (NW 6, Township 15, Range Road 8, E. of the 1st Meridian—Manitoba). The story of this school and the work that the Reid, Madden and McKenzie families did to create this school is documented in a wonderful tale of that area written, but unpublished, by the people of later generations. The title of this 1075 page volume was quite striking for me on the eve of the Bisset School opening...They Stopped in a Good Place; A Local History of the Brokenhead. I wonder whether the children of Bisset School and their families would come to believe that they too had "stopped in a good place."

My Dad recounted an amusing story of a young teacher, 18 years old, that he had read in this historical family journal. Her name was Miss Edith Shatz and her very first teaching assignment was at the Brokenhead School. She was from eastern Canada and knew little of the prairies and prairie farm life. Her trip was a long one that consisted of a grueling train ride to Winnipeg and then an even more adventurous fourteen-mile horse and buggy trip to the family's home where she was boarding. The driver of the buggy told her prairie farming stories and mentioned not to worry too much about the spring thaw on

the prairies. The spring thaw that particular year had been extremely heavy and the Red River was flooding. There were actually places on their journey where the level of the water reached the floor boards of the buggy and the farmer just let the horse swim for it! As my Dad retold the story, I imagined Miss Shatz sitting in the buggy, watching mile after mile of prairie roll by, all looking the same to her eye, with that touch of dirty spring brown defining the landscape and wondering what she had got herself into and whether she would ever survive the journey itself, let alone the teaching assignment!! I wonder what stories we will tell about the people and their lives that are of significance to Bisset School?

The other dancers shape my sense of myself as a dancer.

The sand on the beach invisibly changing and moving in tune with the motion of the waves, shaping me more than I shape them, each movement creating a memory in my consciousness.

The "give and take of repeated encounters...and all the words and concepts I use are old, inherited, part of the way I have been shaped by my environment" (Bateson, 1995, p. 75). "Individual identity takes form in the contexts of relationships and dialogue; our concern must be to create the kinds of contexts that nurture" a sense of worthiness and possibility (Greene, 1995, p. 41). Direction within a dance company "is always dependent on the context, but the context is established by the

relationships we value" (Wheatley, 1992, p. 144).

"I'm the one in charge of celebrations. I may be the only person in the world who's seen a rabbit standing in the mist quietly watching three rainbows. That's worth a celebration any time . . .Now, August ninth is Rainbow Celebration Day" (Baylor, 1986, pp. 9-10).

My Teacher Understood

"My teacher has a way of listening that is really special. She listens to what I say, but she also listens to what I'm trying to say behind my words. I don't need to worry, if I happen to blurt something out, she'll help me to understand what I'm really feeling. We were working on our masks. I was feeling very frustrated. I just needed to be alone to think and to put the finishing touches on my project. I wanted my mask to turn our just like the picture that I had in my head of a Greek goddess, but I needed some peace and quiet. I just couldn't concentrate. I needed space. My teacher noticed that something was wrong. I just shouted, "*I want everyone to go away and leave me alone!*" I slumped down on my desk. That's not really what I meant to say, but my teacher understood.

"Why, don't you take your mask and find a quiet space in the library or outside on the step, so you can do what you think is your very best work." She held out her hand and helped me to gather my materials. "I felt so much better. Next time I'll have

more confidence in myself to notice what I need so I can do my very best work. My teacher understood." (Stories from children, Nov. 1996).

"In thinking about community, we need to emphasize the process words: making, creating, weaving, saying" (Greene, 1995, p. 39) and dancing.

Creating a Caring Community

Creating a Caring Community
A place where many hands join together.
A place where everyone is welcome.
A place for growing
Learning
Caring
And sharing
A place for children of all ages. (Staff Response Journal)

"Community cannot be produced simply through rational formulation nor through edict. Like freedom, it has to be achieved by persons offered the space in which to discover what they recognize together and appreciate in common; they have to find ways to make inter-subjective sense"(Greene, 1995, p. 39). For us, our collective understandings became our way to be in the world, as the dance rhythms created through improvisation and supported by our moral imaginations, linked us together.

This formed a strong sense of community that honored and accepted our multiple perspectives as dancers in a learning relationship. The creation of community "includes the shared construction and conservation of meaning and compassion that exist only as they are lived...I am only real and only have value as long as you are real and have value" (Bateson, 1994, p. 63). Community flows from recognizing in others a sacred sense of an inner self and allowing a place for it to be accepted as the contribution it can be, within the process of becoming all that we can be, in relation to our world. Respect for the complex dancing of the dancers who do contributed to our story of school allows for the whole universe to be felt in our work lives.

We have had the privilege of creating an environment where people can learn, develop and grow as healthy, moral, responsible citizens, friends and individuals. We must celebrate the very ideas that our work has been focused on, the people and the resulting relationships that form a learning community in relation to the world around us. We honor the complexity and wonder of life and depend on who we are as learners, as people and on our personal connections with the tapestry—our tapestry filled with heart, mind, spirit and voice of our collective wisdom. Being wise is being able to give of oneself while knowing what gift to give, where one's self is diminished in relations to the touch which is given...leadership becomes a shared

responsibility where each of us adds our wisdom to the situation that evolves moment by moment." (Year–end Letter to Staff, June, 1996).

> Again, it ought to be a space infused by the kind of imaginative awareness that enables those involved to imagine alternative possibilities for their own becoming and their group's becoming. Community is a question of what might contribute to the pursuit of shared goods: what ways of being together, of attaining mutuality, of reaching toward some common world. (Greene, 1995, p. 39).

Across the lake, the last colors of this spring day warm the sky. The motion of the waves now is nothing more than a memory. The slight breeze that had been ruffling my hair is still. It is so often the way, here at the lake, that the world becomes so very still just before sunset...in my imagination this is the moment that I can hold in my out-stretched hand, a crystal sphere reflecting and capturing my connections with the world. It is like a moment when the world pauses...before it once again provides the context for the complex and intricate relationships that weave in and out of the dance of time. The beautiful pinks and purples of the clouds, in contrast with the bright orange glow of the sun as it sinks into the lake reflecting the colors of the moment and leaves me once again, alone with my thoughts.

> That's when I feel like starting new . . . It always make me think I ought to bloom myself . . . I celebrate with horned toads and ravens and lizards

and quail . . . And, Friend it's not a bad party. I'm the one in charge of celebrations. (Baylor, 1986, pp. 20-24).

THE NARRATOR...TELLING THE STORY OF THE DANCE

The Dawning of Day

I am looking forward to a new day, perhaps a little tentatively, like the first tendrils of color in the early morning sky. I am putting the finishing touches on this piece of my Bisset story and have had the news of my new school assignment for the coming year. I wonder with excitement, anticipation, and yet with some reluctance about this 'new' school. I feel as if the moon has not yet finished the evening dance with the night sky but the sun is beginning her dance. The colors of the morning are stronger and stronger as this new day takes its place in the dance of time. What are the rhythms and cycles of this new school? What is the tone for their dance? What stories will I be told as I learn about this new place? What stories will I bring with me as I begin to feel my way? How will I find my place within the circle of people there? How will I see my role as principal? Will we become companions choosing to work together like dancers in a dance company? I know I will try to listen and care for the stories, I too appreciate the gifts and contributions of the people as we continue to become all that we can be within the unfolding dance of time. As the sun is caught, held and reflected by the many different faces of my crystal prisms I watch in delight the dancing rainbows on our cabin walls. I reflect, myself, on my memories and of the people who danced together, like my rainbows, in radiance and harmony

at Bisset School. I'm glad that I have taken this opportunity to write and share my Bisset School story for it provides a sense of closure like the night. And with the fading of the stars comes the promise of a new day. As I wonder about my first meetings at my new school I think back to the beginnings of Bisset.

As the Principal of Bisset School, I connected the stories of our dancing to our historical schema of beliefs, our collective wisdom, and our new learning, all of which were held within the moral imagination at the heart of our work together. I was the narrator telling the story of our dance. I was the teller of stories. I was weaving connections through the stories that I listened to, that I told, that I shared and that I composed with the touches of the whole company. These stories provided the context in which we as educators constructed meaning from our lived experiences. The stories gave meaning to the unfolding dance.

Every dance has a story to tell. Every moment holds a story. There are many different types and forms that might be used to describe the stories and the images at the heart of a dance. The audience too, adds a layer of meaning and interpretation to the performance as they make sense of the images and stories that they see danced before them. What is the role of the principal in the stories of school?

"Experience may just become a story to tell, unconnected to the place where it is situated, unless we reflect and interpret

that experience in light of a historical schema of beliefs, wisdom and new learning...the interpretation of collective experience, in all of its complicated nuances, becomes a personal challenge for each of us. We reflect by interpreting our lived experience within the relationships that we have forged and the interpretation helps us become who we are." (Year End Letter to Staff, June, 1995).

> Remember only this one thing," said Badger. "The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other's memory. This is how people care for themselves. (Lopez, 1990, p. i)

This is an excerpt from the story *Crow and Weasel.* It is a story of a great adventure for two friends who learned about wisdom, tolerance and hope. "Together they shared stories, exchanged gifts, and enlarged their idea of what is wondrous" (Lopez, 1990, p. i). Like Crow and Weasel, when I was chosen as Principal, to open this brand new elementary school, Bisset, I learned about people, their stories, and their gifts. Together we created something 'wondrous'. I selected, met and encountered many dancers who helped me spin the stories 'that came to us' which told of the 'wondrous' gifts that we each had to offer, and

offered as a thread throughout the ever-unfolding story of our dance at Bisset School. We came together and danced together in the stories that we told.

"Storytelling is for me a reoccurring theme. It is the powerful tool of a teacher. Story weaves together past learning with the present situations creating an understanding, which fuels the dreams, which build our future. Each of us has our own story to tell, thereby providing threads which we connect in crafting compositions or multiple beginnings. In this, there is the shared excitement and an undercurrent of hope and passion that comes from collaboration. Composing a new story; the human search for meaning, involves a continual re-imagining of the future and the reinterpretation of the past to provide the impetus for the learning we have begun." (Year End Letter to Staff, June, 1994).

> What matters is that lives do not serve as models; only stories do that. And it is a hard thing to make up stories to live by. We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. We live our lives through texts. . . . Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives. (Heilbrun, 1988, p. 37)

Stories and the telling of stories have 'forever' been a part of my life and a way for me to make sense from my experiences

and attempt to understandthem. For me telling stories is a form of participation, a way of dancing.

> Because it is not possible to stand aside from participation until we know what we are doing, it is essential to find styles of acting that accept ambiguity and allow for learning along the way. Perception, attention, grace, all of these varied or sustained, provide materials for constructing both self and world, and patterns for joining in the dance. (Bateson, 1994, p. 235)

and for dancing in a story.

The Dawning of Day

The first pink gray fingers of dawn lift the veil of darkness.
The words of wisdom come from the
Grandmother.
She views my thoughts and moral dilemmas as
enlightenment for my mind.
This watcher of values is the respectful spirit of beliefs,
Whose voice quietly affirms that everything has its place.
She sees the past through the senses of the present.

The last lingering light of day remains but a memory in the
mind.
The words of magic come from the
Teller of stories.

She walks the path beside me as I travel the land of
experience and
Shapes the ways of knowing.
This maker of meaning threads the celebrations of life with
the need to remember
She makes sense of the present with the voice of our future.

The promise of company rises with the moon as she shares
the sky with the stars.
The works of life come from the
Dancer.
She connects me gently with the images in my heart,
She moves gracefully among the relationships of the soul.
This keeper of dreams expresses the possibilities for
creative passions
Of the future
Flowing from the lingering motions of today.

The moon has gone home and world prepares for that which
is yet to come.
The worlds of today are resplendent with the ensemble
voices that are
Flowing within Me.

I touch the heart, the soul, and the spirit, of a child of
tomorrow.
The teacher of children creates passion, memories, and
places in the world
As the child steps confidently away, secure in the past,
toward the dawning
Of yet another day.

(My Response Journal, 1996)

A Storyteller

As a young girl around 9 or 10 years of age, I would tell my sister stories every night before the two of us went to sleep. I remember sitting up in my bed long after my sister and I were supposed to be asleep. We were telling stories. The room was usually dark although we were lucky, for there was a dim light from a nearby street lamp, which came filtering through the pink roses on the golden colored drapes covering the window. The headlights from a passing car would create patterns or provide a single beam of light traveling along our bedroom wall. That light would become a part of the story; the eyes of a flying dragon, the candle of a wizard flickering in the night, or the moon momentarily peaking out and shining over the forest before it was once again covered by clouds. I would have my bedspread

and blanket pulled up tight under my chin and Laurie would be snuggled up near the bottom of the bed with a worn yet cozy blue quilt tucked in around her. I always told the stories and Laurie listened only interrupting with an occasional question or thought that she wanted to have explained or woven into the story. Our stories continued until one or both of us were too tired to keep our eyes open any longer. These were special times for me. I would often invite Laurie to give me a topic, a character, or the kind of story that she wanted to hear, then off I'd go spinning a tale of wonderment. Sometimes Laurie would ask a question like; "Sue, how does a dragon become a wizard's friend? Why don't we have unicorns any more? Who plays with the stars? What is the story behind the coin you always keep on your bulletin board?" When we got a little older the questions from Laurie were more particular to the events of our current experiences. The questions that I remember changed to ones like, "Sue, what are you looking forward to when we move into our new house? Why didn't you stay longer in Los Angeles to dance? What should we do about...?"

The names of the characters in my stories were those of our family, or other known people. The problems to be solved, usually happily, but not without trials and tribulations, and magic and celebrations, were ones that came from my observations of the people and situations around me. I don't know how I did

this, except I do remember that I would close my eyes and just begin. The images would form and I'd describe what I saw, heard, touched, tasted, knew, and felt. I didn't always remember the 'chapter' from the previous night, but Laurie always did. She would recount the tale and then I would pick up the thread and continue to create from there.

When we were younger the stories that we liked best were created out of my love for fantasy; dragons and princesses, castles and magical lands, of times long, long ago and far, far away, of unicorns and angels, and of magical tokens and wishes come true. As time passed our favorite stories were about relationships and happenings that did not yet make 'perfect' sense to us. It was these stories that gave me a chance to carefully observe, notice, listen, and begin to understand the needs and feelings of the people who were at that time sharing my world. There was always a way to be successful in my stories.

"Our species thinks in metaphor and learns through stories" (Bateson, 1994, p. 11). My early stories covered a range of topics but always began "in a time long, long ago and not so long ago and in a place far, far away and not so far away. . . ." At that time I believed that these stories just came out of my head on the spur of the moment. I was making them up, or was I? The contribution made to the stories by my sister as she

told me the characters she wanted, identified the setting or suggested the problem to be solved gave me a starting place. The length of these stories varied. Some of them would go on for many nights, still other stories came to their endings within one storytelling session and finally there were some stories where the theme came back again and again as important issues were restoried. Always for us, as children, there was an added element of intrigue, for we believed that our parents never knew that this was going on for the stories were told after the bedtime routines, after the goodnights and after the lights were turned out! Although I now remember very few of the specific stories, I know the people, places and times involved in my stories were all taken from my own experiences. I was making connections and putting the familiar words together in a new way. This was a process of reconstructing meaning from my own memories, stories, and experiences. I was learning through my stories and finding a way to participate in life, in new ways by attending to something new or seeing the familiar in new ways (Bateson, 1994, p. 10). I bring this history of storytelling with me into my role as school principal.

These stories, because they were shared or 'given away', also developed a closeness between my sister and myself. We shared a relationship that included a story tradition, a caring for the time we spent together and a caring for the stories that we

shared. These storytelling moments in our childhood are still topics of conversation when my sister and I get together to reminisce about our favorite memories. I was engaged in a process of exploration. I was attempting to come to some understanding, for myself, concerning my beliefs and values about life, my life, and my place within my stories. This practice, I believe, shaped the way in which I encounter situations, make connections and 'care for the stories' that are present in my relationships now, whether these are relationships with people, ideas, time and/or place.

The adventures that Crow and Weasel had and the stories that they told came about "through their own attentiveness and curiosity. Crow and Weasel learned profound and affecting lessons: how to behave as a friend; the necessity of giving thanks; and how experiencing the intriguing life of another people is crucial to finding one's own place in the world" (Lopez, 1990, p. I). I believe this is also true for me and that my own interest and attentiveness to the people, situations and the ensuing relationships that I discovered formed the steps for my movements and helped me to tell the stories threading through our dance.

Storytelling is the process of reconstructing events in the past and is useful for understanding ourselves in the present (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). The stories, in my life, gave me a

way of sharing experiences and sharing the meaning and understanding that I was making through them. Stories and the telling of these stories also gave me a way of connecting my meaning making with the other dancers in the company dancing along with me. "The story form is a cultural universal . . . it reflects a basic and powerful form in which we make sense of the world and experience. Indeed some people claim that the story form reflects a fundamental structure of our minds (Levi-Strauss, 1966)" (Egan, 1986, p. 2).

I am attentive to my surroundings and attuned to the tone created by the 'rainbows' on the cabin walls. It is very peaceful and yet magical to contemplate the unseen air movements that make these rainbows dance in time to an unheard rhythm. As I watch the overlapping and blending colors, my mind is wondering about many things. Who will I be in relation to this new group of people? How will I share with them and learn from them about the possibilities that we each hold for the future deep within a moral imagination? Will we be able to create a shared sense of history that will allow us to make space and time to have the conversations about what is important to us as learners, as people entrusted with the future? How do they define their worlds? Will we be able to create rainbow bridges to connect and expand our worlds? Will I share with them the stories of my childhood? I am feeling the anticipation smiling within my heart. The image of rainbow bridges is a powerful one for me, delighting my sense of imagination. What is the story at the end of the rainbow?

I was very excited and thrilled to be opening a new school. I did not know how much my life would be touched by the learning, the experiences, the grief, the sorrow, the joy, and the celebration that happened in relationship with people, their ideas and the weaving together that we did to compose our story of school. During my interview for the position of Principal, I spoke with passion about a school where children and learning were placed at the very heart. I wanted to create a story of school where everyone was learning and working together to create the very best learning space that we knew how to create.

A School Home

Now that my hope was a reality, the task seemed to be very daunting and overwhelming. There was so much to do, to think about, to plan for, and too many things to get organized. Where do I start?

The parents of the Bisset community had actually begun many months before than my appointment, in February of 1989. They had become actively involved in the spring of 1988. They had been promised a school ten years before when the lots were first on the market. Cathy, a very active parent in the community and later in our school itself, remembers being extremely frustrated that her children would have to go to a neighboring school for kindergarten. Her biggest concern was that the

designated school already had over 700 children with many of them housed in portables. The washrooms were over-crowded, the lunch program full and Cathy did not want to have her daughter in that kind of environment when there was, in her mind, a viable alternative. The school for the Bisset community was actually on the books to be built, but that wouldn't be for at least another year. This was too late for Cathy. The parents went door to door in the community to collect the accurate numbers of children that would attend a public school, if there were one built for the fall of 1989. Armed with that and other pertinent information, the parents of the community successfully lobbied the school trustees to move up the starting date. This was going to be their school and as Cathy said, "We want the best for our children and we want to be involved!" They were passionate.

I was too! In my mind, I had an additional reason for that little extra motivation. My first child was to be born during the summer, just before the school would open. I really wanted to create a school, a dynamic learning environment, where I as a mother and an educator would want to send my child, a place where my child would be loved and be able to live, grow, learn and be appreciated for all that he might become as a learner and as a person. The parents and I had many things in common!

There were times that without these thoughts to sustain me I might have settled for something less than what I knew was right. I learned a lot dealing with architects, contractors, site foremen, suppliers and buyers. The architect commented one day that the colors that I was selecting were ones that he would recommend more commonly for a show home and was I sure that I didn't want bright yellow, blue or red? I shared with him that I was creating a home, a home away from home, so that the children would feel safe, comfortable and willing to share their lives with the school. The architect told me he had never spoken with someone who cared so much about the colors and the feelings that they would create for the people 'living' in school before he met me.

The Site Foreman was concerned that I was requiring a change to the blue prints when I suggested that the loft area needed to have opening windows to help with the ventilation. I also didn't want the loft to be away from the flow patterns that I was envisioning for the school. I think that he was surprised that I could talk about ventilation! Actually, so was I! My Dad helped me out; he was a civil engineer and helped me to look for a few important details. There were many such conversations about the height of kindergarten counters, electrical plugs and phone jacks. The contractor and I spoke very different kind of languages but I learned about "specs, blue prints, drawings, and

the construction trade." He learned about the needs of children, and that the building had to support the work and learning of the people in the school. He commented, "Sue you're not building a building, you're building something bigger than that." I smiled and agreed. I still have my blue hard hat hanging in my closet!!

The groundbreaking ceremony was over, and the parents were involved in a range of committees and tasks. I now needed people to help me get started, to share in the spirit of this adventure...to become companions united in a new beginning. I wanted to be able to talk to people, to share ideas, to listen to their stories, and to spin new stories. Their contributions would give me that important starting place...the image for our dance.

I watch the dancing rainbows and listen to my heart. What will be the new images for the dance? What stories will we spin as we get to know each other as dancers, learning to share our stories of school and our stories to live by? I think about community and how we might come to be a community. Perhaps we should think of our school community as a village: a village where classrooms became school 'homes', a village where everyone has a contribution to make and a responsibility for the whole community.

I wanted to share, to learn, to grow, with a 'family' of people who cared as I did for children and who would wonder about all the possibilities inherent in new beginnings. I wanted

to have conversations with people about teaching and learning and how this might play out in our school practices. I also wanted people who would be excited and thrilled to be involved in creating this special place with me. I needed a company, a dance company.

I was extremely fortunate because I did have the opportunity to choose and select all of the staff who would shape this beginning. As I reflect and think about this critical point in the story of Bisset School there is one idea that stands out for me. Every one of the people who became a part of the school staff had a connection of some kind with me. This was certainly not a conscious decision on my part but it did make some sense because of what was important to me and my story to live by (Clandinin & Connelly, 1997), as I began to create a dance company. It was the people, the learning and the stories that would link us together as a company that was so important. I had a sense that personal common ground was necessary for it helped me find that starting place to begin to weave a history, or a feeling of connectedness, that would bring us together in our work. It was shared work, because the stories of coming to this place were relevant and easily shared with one another as our first common experience. That link with me had created a safe place to begin to tell those stories.

The First Meeting

It was a beautiful day in early June. The sun was shining and the flowers were decorating the landscape. I was hoping that everything was ready, I was thinking at least, I was as ready as I could be. This was the very first time that the whole staff, the twelve of us, would be meeting. I had chosen that we would spend this day together at my home. It was exciting and nerve-wracking all at the same time. I at least knew or had met each of the others and I was on 'pins and needles' so I could imagine what was running through everyone's mind as they got ready for the day. I remember hoping that all would go well, that we would like each other, and would be able to make plans for our future work together. I was pacing back and forth in the living room, watching out the window and anxiously waiting for the first people to arrive. I was wearing my favorite (and most comfortable) white pants and navy sailor-motif shirt with bare feet in my white canvas runners.

Peggy was the first to arrive. She was excited and remembers wondering what the day would hold. She was curious about the people and the activities that we were going to be involved in. Peggy and I chatted briefly about her sabbatical and whether or not she was looking forward to being back with children. There was an emphatic "Yes". Peggy and I had taught together briefly many years previously, when the two of us, as

teachers, were involved in opening a new school. It was around November of that same year when I moved to a consulting position. Our paths continued to criss-cross throughout the years, usually meeting through professional development activities. Peggy also remembers feeling that she was going to stay in the background and get a feel for the people and who they were. This was a transition for her, back into the world of teaching after spending a year on study leave. Peggy was still in the entry way when Phyllis arrived.

Phyllis was quiet, calm and sparkling. She was the sister of a friend of mine with whom I had worked in consulting services. Phyllis was just great and remembers feeling so honored to be working with me. She had heard many stories of me all of which I hoped that I could live up to! She was looking forward to this new challenge, probably the last school in her long and successful career.

Mark arrived next in a flurry of activity as he rode right up to the front door. He had ridden his bike from Millwoods, down the Whitemud Freeway, during the morning rush hour traffic. He was dressed in his biking gear and was very hot even though it was still early in the morning! We all thought that he must be crazy. "How long did it take you to get here?" we asked. Mark had a ton of energy and after he recovered from his ride a little while later, he reminded us all not to be so very serious. We all

laughed and agreed with him.

Maureen arrived and shared with me later that she was quite relieved and glad that she made the 'right' decision. I asked her what she meant. She said that she had the hardest time deciding what to wear for the day. She wanted to look professional, yet casual and was concerned that perhaps her shorts, which she finally decided on, might be out of place. Maureen, like Phyllis, had spoken with a friend before coming to work at Bisset. "I'd die to work with Sue. You'll just love her. Boy, are you ever lucky." Seeing Mark in his cycling gear and Darcy, our custodian, in his leather motorcycling gear, Maureen realized that nothing was out of place!

Darcy remembers hoping that he would be able to contribute something to the conversations and he asked me a lot of questions before coming, so that he would feel comfortable with the day, "Do I really have to be there? I'm not sure that I will have anything to say." I assured him that he did indeed have a lot to contribute and that we needed him and his ideas. Darcy and Debbie had worked with me before at previous schools and knew that a new school was what they wanted to do. They helped a lot to alleviate some of the flutters others were experiencing as they spoke with confidence about working with me.

Deb was looking forward to meeting, teaching, and

working alongside Mel. Mel was a master teacher whom she had heard so much about. We all remember that Mel was immaculately dressed and that he helped us so much with our discussions about programming. His gentle soft voice with a Maritime lilt, is still one that I hear when I think of those early years. His wisdom still lives with us at school any time that we think about children, combined groupings or experiences with portfolios instead of report cards.

Judy who was the first person that I hired, our school secretary, helped me a great deal. We had been working to put together much of the furniture order, newsletters for parents, and much more throughout the previous two months. I would never have had as much accomplished without her help, especially connecting with the parents of the community. Judy remembers handling many parent requests and phone calls that spring. I knew Judy before she agreed to work with me at Bisset. She and several other people had worked with my husband, Neil, in different schools that had been a part of his story. Mel too had worked with both Judy and Neil. Mel and Judy were quietly talking in the family room. Phyllis and Peggy were talking in the kitchen about spring and the love that Phyllis had for her garden. Mark and Darcy were talking about motorcycles and riding.

Gerry had called Neil one evening and asked Neil to put in a good word for him during the screening process! He was

ready to move schools and thought that this was a great opportunity for him. Gerry also remembers that he couldn't believe the feeling of expertise that was alive and coming through in the conversations throughout that first meeting. "Wow, this is going to be a dynamite group of people." Gerry, too, had opened a new school before and brought some of that experience to the group.

Sandy arrived in her blue and white striped shorts and wondered who drove the Lincoln? It was Phyllis! Sandy remembers the conversation around her 'interview' that took place one evening at her house! As she, too, had worked briefly with Neil and had known Neil from university days, Neil joined our conversation. We each learned a lot about our hopes and dreams for this new place that was taking shape. Marvey had worked with both Sandy and Neil before. She and Sandy had worked closely together in the kindergarten classroom and knew how their respective skills and talents complemented each other. They were a special team.

Marlene has wonderfully vivid memories of that first meeting. This was her first school, her first job in Edmonton, her first experience with a new school. She remembers feeling that she didn't even really know what her job would entail, yet here she was, being welcomed into this group of people in such a warm genuine way. It didn't take long before she was feeling

she could contribute some of her values and beliefs even if she still had to learn about her role as a program aide. She felt a part of the whole staff, a group of people who complemented each other beautifully. Marlene and I had in common a wonderful friend who played quite an instrumental part in my earlier years as a Principal. He helped Marlene and me instantly feel a close bond because of the role that he played in both of our lives.

The weaving of our stories had begun. We had started as individuals making career decisions and choices. We began that day to create a story of school together, which belonged to each of us, and to all of us. We began to build our story of school from my home, without a school building to define the boundaries for us.

I am a school Principal. I am a teller of stories. What might it mean to look at the role of a principal as that of a storyteller? What do I do as a teller of stories? I believe this is the way that I lived my role at Bisset School. I told stories not just of things that I saw, or heard, or felt, or knew, but I told stories about my explorations into new possibilities. I wanted to experience new things by exploring them like a dancer exploring a range of movements to convey the dance image. I would share a story not just as a description of our use of portfolios for communicating student learning, for example, but as a shared

story of the experiences that we had together, as a company, living and learning about portfolio assessment. My stories do come from somewhere. They have a beginning, middle and an end, although at the time of telling I was not always aware of the end, as the dance was still unfolding. The story was not over for I was living in the story.

The content for my stories were lived and relived, were told and retold, were storied and restoried. Each time that a new idea gained understanding through dialogue, we recombined patterns of living in new ways as we shared our learning, growing and living with each other. The teller of stories helped all of us to attend to and to recognize these new ways, this new learning and increased understanding. The meaning and experiences of people's stories that were embedded or coiled one in another were just waiting for us to bring our metaphors, our questions, our understandings to unlock them to make yet another improvised or adaptive pattern. In each and every interaction that I had with my staff, the children or their parents, I would try to open new possibilities which would allow us to restory, recombine and translate the experiences into a story-line for our dancing. I did not want to close the way for new relationships to be forged, but to continue our learning and participation with the dance as it was calling to each of us.

In this way, as a teller of stories, of our individual stories,

and of our collective stories which crafted the stories of Bisset School, I was not a passive observer recounting tales, but was an active participating dancer in the dancing as it was unfolding. "No story can be locked within the limits of a single horizon" (Bruner, 1996, p. 96). Our work became shared work as the staff continued to openly talk about our important work in staff meetings, classrooms, hallways and other common places, each of us taking what we needed from the stories.

> It is the give and take of talk that makes collaboration possible. For the agentive mind is not only active in nature, but it seeks out dialogue and discourse with other active minds. And it is through this dialogic, discursive process that we come to know the others and his points of view, his stories. We learn an enormous amount not only about the world but about ourselves. . . . (Bruner, 1996, p.93)

November 11th

It was November 11th. The school was actually closed for the statutory holiday, but as Sandy recalls I could have called a staff meeting as there were that many of the staff at school working. Everyone was getting ready for conference time. This was a time when parents, children and staff sat down to share the learning journey of the children as depicted in their portfolios. This was still a relatively new process for all of us and one that

continued to change each time that we went through a round of conferences. The portfolio process was a Bisset story that was unfolding as we understood more and more about the complexities of this assessing and evaluating process from the perspectives of parents, children and staff. The school was just alive and buzzing with the energy characteristic of our work together.

Sandy was leaning over a bookcase in the library sharing her thoughts with Sherryl, a Year 3/4 teacher, about student reflection in the context of an activity in her kindergarten program. This was a conversation that set into motion a new twist on goal setting that traveled throughout the staff.

Sandy and Sherryl came and shared their ideas and excitement with me. We had a great conversation and explored the new possibilities. We talked about how it might play out in other contexts and how it helped children to think about learning as a process that they were involved in. We talked about our school's philosophy statement and decided that the goal setting done by parents, children and their teachers was indeed a practice that reflected the beliefs that we shared about teaching and learning.

Monica and I, a little while later, were talking about her program plan. We were wondering how she might find a way to show her classroom, as the learning environment, or context

within which parents would be able to situate their child's learning, in the written format of the program plan. I told her the story about what Sandy and Sherryl had been exploring and suggested, "Monica, I think that they may be able to give you some ideas. It seems to me that if we put together what you and I have been exploring with the ideas that they are figuring out, we might have something truly fantastic!"

Monica, Sherryl and Sandy did some ground breaking work that formed the springboard for many other practices which enhanced our understandings of our portfolios as well as our broader values and beliefs about communicating student growth to children and their parents. The story of these woven thoughts and ideas were told and retold with the rest of the staff up and down the hallways. This chapter of our portfolio story provided a way for many more such successes and ideas to be incorporated and woven into it.

Stories permit me to talk about what I am trying to show and model about my values and beliefs. When I am telling a story about something or trying to capture the essence of a thought in a conversation, I am telling a story in order to understand. The conversation is very important because it helps me to make sense jointly and to create, tell and/or listen to the collaborative stories that connect the lives of the Bisset people to our shared work and sense of purpose. My role as Principal

became one of listening and responding to the stories of others, sharing my own stories in the context of their stories, recognizing threads from all the stories and weaving them together to tell a story of school. This was the story of our work together told in such a way that everyone could identify his or her contribution to the intricate and multi-layered story of school. This was like a dance performance where the many elements, including tone, imagination, expertise and connection with the audience were vibrant and alive with possibilities.

Through our stories we knew each other well. The 'living' school story was a safe place to be. The places people have to tell their stories are important. I created safe places to share stories but I also helped the stories live, change and become more essential to us collectively than any individual story left alone, unvalued. I picked the patterns to weave into our story and I also collected the threads that would blend, enhance, provide contrast and complement the overall weaving. This weaving was like the dancer's movements creating the tone in our school. We all asked the questions and took from the stories what was needed for our own life stories. I was not the only storyteller in our school family. I was learning, growing and changing as other stories brought insight and understanding to my life.

Who are the storytellers in a school? The storyteller is

often in the persona of the grandmother or the grandfather of the family, the wise elders. They, from their position in the family, link their stories and memories from when they were growing up in another time, to a circumstance or situation that is being played out currently, or in the present. There are other storytellers, however, in a family: the children. Children have stories to tell. Children at Bisset have stories to tell.

I wonder what stories the children in my new school will tell? I wonder what sense they are making of the change of Principal in their story of school? What wise words of wisdom will they have for me as they help me to understand and to make sense of my new school? Will they find a place in their stories for me? The angle of the sun has changed. The crystal prisms are no longer creating rainbows, but the sunshine is making the room seem warm and safe.

That's Just What We Do!

"Laughter and smiles and hugs and chatter. That's what I noticed today. Everyone wants to be at school, the children, teachers and parents. It's important work that we do, and we work really hard, but it's also fun. Hearing my teacher laugh and smile with another person makes me want to try even harder to do my very best."

"Hearing my teacher ask me, "What can I do to help you with your work?", makes me glow with pride."

"Hearing my Mom say "now you can teach me all about numbers", makes me understand that school is important to her, too."

"I'm learning about who I am, and who we are, but I know that no one is better than anyone else is. My teacher explains to us all the time about our individual gifts that we have to share with others in the classroom. Mine is recognizing number patterns and being a good friend. We are each who we are learning to be."

"I know that I'm smart because my teacher tells me that, all the time. I'm smart with numbers, just like Mom said. Jesse is smart with drawing. I encourage him to draw because his work is so beautiful. Kim is smart with dancing; it just looks like she is having so much fun, moving through the air. Sean is smart at figuring things out. He just always seems to know. When we let him speak and really listen hard, he helps us figure it out too. I'm learning to listen. My teacher is always figuring things out. She tells us what she's working on. I think she thinks we have all the answers. Maybe she can't remember anymore, but I think that she is really smart too. I guess we do have all the answers that we need, especially when we work together. My school accepts me for who I am. We're all learning, all of the time. That's just what we do! Sometimes it is so hard to think about what I mean, but everyone is happy, even

the custodian was singing in the hallway this morning!" (Stories from children, Nov. 1996)

Staff members have stories to tell.

Marlene and I were talking in the library of the school, a large common area where many significant conversations occur. We were sharing stories about how the stories from school and home can become connected when personal values and convictions are a valued part of both settings. I picked up on that thread and wondered how practices as representations of those beliefs in one setting, can influence and shape new practices in the other.

There was laughter in the library as Marlene reminded me of a story about what one of her children had said, a couple of years ago. Marlene had come into the living room, at home, and overheard a conversation between two of her children. They were talking about making good choices and remembering to take into consideration the feelings and circumstances of the others involved. Marlene burst out laughing and Keith wondered what was so funny. "You sound just like I did at Bisset School when I was talking to some children about making caring choices. I guess that all of my work at school has come home for us to think about and to use here, at home."

Keith replied that it just made good sense to make caring choices. "Mom that's how we learn to take responsibility for the

choices we make." Marlene was so proud of her children and proud of the work that she was doing at school that it became a story to live by. It did make sense and it was something that she deeply believed in and was able to put into practice as a mother and as educator.

One Cold Winter's Day

Having an ear for stories meant that as a mother or as a principal or as a dancer, I could be attuned to a story in the making. This was an important way that I learned to care for stories and to recognize their worth. Jimmy told me a story about his experiences in school one day, which I was very glad that I listened to and didn't just dismiss his purposeful and meaningful activity as irrelevant to my agenda at the time. It was a story that he was telling and making up as he went along. As I listened to his conversation an image was held in my heart of the sense that he was making out of his lived experiences. This story was one that I used to help other parents link and connect with their child's life at school. His story went something like this:

It was a cold winter day, and we had just arrived home from school. I was tired and moved immediately from my principal role to my mother role and began the supper

preparation and the lunch making for the next day. I was completely unaware of what Jimmy was up to. He was busily creating and gathering the necessary props for his story. This meant that there was a growing pile of strange implements in the family room. I inquired with a tinge of annoyance in my voice if Jimmy knew what he was doing. Silly question! Jimmy began to tell me his story. "Mom, I'm not Jimmy. I am Dr. Jim the famous paleontologist. I am about to travel to my latest archeological dig in Red Deer, Alberta. I'm looking for the terrible Tyrannosaurus Rex. I just need to inspect all of my very special tools before the jeep gets here to take me to my dig. I will use the rake to clear all of the extra stuff out of the way before I start digging. This shovel of course is to dig for the dinosaur bones that I am sure to find. The broom is to clean away the extra dirt so that I can clearly see what Tyrannosaurus bone I discover. The string and chopsticks are so I can mark the site because I don't want someone else interrupting what I am doing. I also need to take very good notes and draw the diagrams so I need the paper, pencil and my clipboard. I'll be gone for many days so don't worry if I'm not home for supper." With that brief explanation he put on his snowsuit and 'traveled' to the backyard for some serious digging. Jimmy was in the Bisset kindergarten and he and his class had been talking and learning about dinosaurs. I was very impressed with the story

that he told and the experiences he was sharing with me. I went on making supper and fortunately Dr. Jim did arrive home just in time to join us! He still tells a version of this story some two years later, he starts with, "Mommy, do you remember when..."

Stories are a traditional art form, as old as the tradition of dancing, both expressing the ritual of ceremony. They link or connect individuals' stories to other individuals' stories in a way that provides a sense of continuity, unity and insight for the teller and the listener...the dancer and the audience.

A Recess Story

There was one day in early spring that I was very frustrated and at a loss, for what to do with a group of our senior kids. This was a group of primarily boys, although not exclusively, who were in years 5 and 6. It was soccer season. Soccer was an activity that I both looked forward to and dreaded. I looked forward to it because it meant that winter was over and the rainy spring weather was also coming to an end. The children could be outside at recess engaging in activities of their choice, that were fun, giving them a break from the expectations that their teachers had for them inside the classroom. Wrong! I was making a huge assumption that I had never really thought about before. What did I actually "know" and believe about recess? What did I value and what did I want

the children to value? How do I represent to children what I believe and value? How do I show them that they can and do make contributions to the world in which they live? I believe that children need to define their world, feel successful within that world and be able to make valued and valuable contributions to their world. Recess was supposed to be fun!

Elementary schools have just always had recess. In fact, it's in the School Act, so it was a piece of the school organization that I never had challenged in my own mind, until I was so frustrated that I was ready to scream. I came to dread the word soccer. That one word was enough to have me question what it was I was trying to do.

Every recess ended with a delegation of students in my office with complaints, concerns and stories about the "tactics" one team or another was employing during this "fun" activity. These conversations usually involved tears, injured pride, blaming, tempers and a clear cut line between right and wrong doing—at least in the eyes of the kids. I had tried every problem solving technique that I knew. Nothing had a long lasting effect. Not even the "threat" of having soccer become a banned activity at school resulted in the story where "they lived happily ever after." In a moment of pure desperation, I asked the children a question. Without knowing it at the time, I was beginning to help them restory recess. "What do you think that recess is for?"

At first I got the predictable answers: "to have fun", "to play", "to take a break", "to have a time when teachers aren't always there", "to be with our friends", etc.

I then said, "You know what kids, you are only partly right...but that's not what I believe recess could be at our school!"

The kids looked at me with that staring look of disbelief that only 11 and 12 year olds can summon. I waited and the silence in the room lengthened. The kids were madly scrambling to think of a response to the unspoken question. Most of them probably thinking, what in the world is she talking about now! Still, I waited. Now the soccer players were beginning to squirm. I had changed the rules of the game and they didn't know what to do. Normally, I would be talking about ways to solve the problem and to change behaviors so that the problem no longer existed...which obviously in my mind anyway, was a strategy that hadn't worked so far. Finally, I started to talk, making up what I was saying, as I went along. This was not a speech that I had previously thought of, used or rehearsed. I was improvising.

I don't remember all that was said or discussed except we talked about some of the things that we valued. I told them a story about recess on a different planet, where the kids practiced all that they had been taught at home and at school, by their

parents, friends and teachers. On this planet, recess was a part of the children's lives not a break from learning. I wondered aloud, how one could actually take a break from learning? We talked about their concept of learning, about my concept of learning and what that had to do with all of us as learners. One on the boys, Tim, pondered aloud "so you mean that if we tried and also practiced all of the ideas that we have been talking about, because we think it is an important part of our lives, just like reading, then we wouldn't have fights about soccer?" I nodded slowly.

"I think so. It probably won't solve everything right away. If we begin to think about recess as a time to show the world what you have been learning and if our actions show that we value recess as an important part of the whole day, then maybe recess won't take on the meaning of being a break from learning, but become another way for learning about who you are as learners. Are you becoming the people you want to be?" We had a long discussion about who they each wanted to be and what that might look like, sound like and feel like, as a new pattern for shaping the time in their day called recess.

Storytellers embody a sense of keeping the values of the whole company. In this way the narrator for the dance is a keeper of the traditions, a keeper of the collective wisdom, a keeper of the dreams, and provides a sense that the dance is

connected to something bigger than the individuals that make up the company. The storyteller provides a fluid, sometimes changing sense of history that is linked to the present in order for the dancers to recognize existing patterns that allow them to continue on with their explorations into the unknown future. The storyteller provides the company with a certain idea of who they are and where they have come from. In this way the storyteller also provides a link, or the beginnings of a path into the future. "We often forget that tradition, too, is always being made and remade. Tradition is fluid, it is always being reconstituted" (Sarup, 1994, p. 97).

The Spirit of Stories

Storytellers have a way of keeping alive the spirit of what makes a dance company a company, a home a home, and a school a school. The creating of a common set of stories that begin to define the similarities and take note of the differences between one set of stories and another set is important.

There are many stories that speak to the spirit of Bisset School. Here is a story told by a parent, who asked that I share this with the staff in appreciation of the role our school had in her life.

It's Like a Smile

"It is like a smile, warm, friendly and welcoming. That is how I felt and continue to feel every time I walk through the doors of Bisset School. This feeling of warmth and friendliness goes all the way back to the days when Bisset was located at its temporary home, where walking into the narrow green office shared by Sue and Judy, you were always greeted with a smile... a smile that held warmth and encouraged communication. They always wanted to hear my 'news'. It felt wonderful to be valued.

As I sit here now and reflect back to the earliest days of Bisset School I see countless images flashing through my head. Images that include standing at the corner, with my daughter and our neighbor's children, waiting for their school bus to arrive. When it did arrive and the doors opened up, there in the front seat would be Peggy or Phyllis with smiles greeting our children for the journey to school and they would be there on the journey home again. I can still picture the children of Bisset, that first Christmas, sitting in the hall of the temporary school, dodging wet snow boots and trying to read the words of a Christmas song as they sang each day before Christmas.

The next image that comes to mind is that of green garbage bags. There were hundreds of green garbage bags all packed with the children's belongings as we prepared to move from our temporary home to our new school home. I don't remember how many we crammed into my van as I drove with a

number of them over to the new school, but I do remember that it seemed easier to put them into the van than it was to take them out!

I had nightmares for a while after I spent a week at home and at school unpacking boxes of brand new, fresh smelling library books. They all had to be taped, stamped, sorted, and checked into the computer system. The second, and certainly not last, work bee at the school that I remember was when we were cutting fabric and cardboard, gluing and ironing together with paper, to make dozens and dozens of empty books so that the children of Bisset could become authors.

A very special memory that still brings a lump to my throat was during the opening ceremonies when the children sang the Bisset song. I had heard it before when they were practicing but nothing could replace the special pride I felt when the children stood at their places throughout the audience and sang their song with voices proud and harmonious.

There were sadder moments at Bisset, too. Fires, not one, but two of them. The first when the school was under construction which delayed when we were able to move in and the second, which really was more devastating, when the new pod was under construction. I can still see the hurt and angry tears of the Bisset children as they watched the firemen put out the fire and see the damage that had been done. This

happened on a weeknight and the next morning the doors were opened as usual with the staff there to greet the children and hug away the tears. I saw a lot of pride and caring for their school in the eyes and the faces of the children.

Even sadder and harder to deal with was death. There were several such tragedies that I remember; the death of a very special teacher and person, Mel; death in the families of staff; death in the families of students and even the deaths of classmates and friends. Death is hard to understand for adults and even harder for the children, but there was lots of support from staff. There was support for each other, for the children, for the parents and for the community. I will remember this always for it taught me a lot about my school, my community, and the strength that we all have in difficult times.

Of course, there are always the memories of conference time at Bisset. Parents, and even grandparents, joining with the teacher and their child, reflecting on the past term's work. Establishing those goals for our children so we as parents could be part of the process was truly a special time. We, of course, then had to help our children make their own goals. During conference time the hallways were filled with parents. They would be sitting in the hall enjoying an audio or video presentation of their child's day to day work. For me, this was always a special time when I would snuggle and cuddle with one

of my daughters and laugh, or be totally awed by some of their work and accomplishments.

It is too bad that in our daily lives we are often too busy to take time and remember these warm stories and memories. These are the stories that tend to help us keep our perspective and recognize what is really important in our lives. Each of these memories I have shared are a part of me. They have helped me grow and I will cherish them always." (Parent Story).

Through the telling of my own stories, I have had an opportunity to look differently at society, cultures within society and my own experiences within a community and school culture. I wanted to keep alive the spirit of what made Bisset School, Bisset School. "Each person is calibrated by experience, almost like a measuring instrument for difference, so discomfort is informative and offers a starting point for new understanding" (Bateson, 1994, p. 17). Stories and the telling of these stories were the way I chose to see and understand the worldview of the staff, children and parents of Bisset...just like my story of the little green chameleon.

"We live in a sea of stories" (Bruner, 1996, p.147) and the storytellers help us to pay attention to those stories that are needed . . . that come to us. Storytellers help us to define the world in which we live and to make decisions about our actions, our practices, so that we can create our own stories to live by.

"When human action finally achieves its representation in words, it is not in a universal and timeless formula that it is expressed but in a story" (p. 158). The stories that are told in any family or school are the product of the storytellers and those very storytellers or narrators have points of view (p. 123).

As the teller of stories I must care about the well being of the school 'family', for they, too, are in the stories. "You cannot explain a story; all you can do is give it variant interpretations" (Bruner, 1996, p. 122). "The object of interpretation is understanding, not explanation . . . nor does the interpretation of any particular narrative rule out other interpretations" (p. 90). This is the power of stories.

Crow and Weasel

Why do I use stories and see my role as the teller of those stories? Perhaps because I tell stories as a way to answer a question that has no specific truth, offering a perspective based on a single step or an ensemble of movements. Stories are my way of looking at a question that requires ambiguity in its answer and an exploration into the art form of improvisation to discover the meanings that might be held there. A story can be told so that each person, can discover a fit within the story that individual is living, or a way of changing the direction of his or her own story. Perhaps, as well, stories can be told as a way of

engaging others in the conversation and mingling their imaginations to dream another way of being . . . to make sense out of the moment. There is a responsibility that comes with being a storyteller (Sewell, 1994).

As I listened, respected, shaped, danced, added, connected, created and composed our stories about our lived experiences I felt a great obligation and responsibility to respect the honor, dignity and well being of people. This was my way of recognizing the multiplicity of human perspective and capacity to live storied lives. (Greene, 1995) "Schools should be committed to a great moral purpose: to care for children so that they, too, will be prepared to care" (Noddings, 1992, p. 64). Through my role as a teller of stories I was able to care for all people that were a part of our school. They were also prepared to care and share in the work of our learning community because we were connected through a story of care. This was my responsibility. "Responsibility is broader, deeper, and more ambiguous than accountability, and it describes commitment in interpersonal relations more accurately" (Noddings, 1992, p. 65).

Stories can be told as a way of connecting the worlds we each inhabit and of learning about who we are and who we are becoming. "Identity is a construction, a consequence of a process of interaction between people, institutions and practices" (Sarup, 1994, p. 102). "Identity is changed by the

journey; our subjectivity is recomposed" (p. 98). I tell stories to connect people, place and time, within a context that allows each of us to be participants in their own learning. This kind of learning happens along the way as a "way of knowing and imagining connections about which we cannot yet be explicit" (Bateson, 1994, p. 140). I use metaphors in many of my stories because these metaphors help me to integrate ideas and practices within the context of my relationships with the people who are my companions throughout my dancing. "A metaphor goes on generating ideas and questions, so that a metaphorical approach to the world is endlessly fertile and involves constant learning. A good metaphor continues to instruct. A metaphor can propose testable questions and serve as a framework for synthesizing information." (p. 135). It is possible to have as many stories and metaphors as there are experiences, in fact it is important to "live with many and to take no one metaphor as absolute" (p. 140).

> At first, Crow and Weasel said little about what had happened to them, following the custom of their people. . . . Late one afternoon, the day Mountain Lion had appointed for people to gather in his lodge to begin to hear the stories of their journey, Crow and Weasel were walking on the western edge of the village. They were speaking of what the things they had done meant to them, and of how the stories should go. . . . Weasel said very softly, It is good to be alive. To have friends, to have a family, to have children,

> to live in a particular place. These relationships are sacred. They turned and began walking up through the snow together toward Mountain Lion's lodge" (Lopez, 1990, pp. 64-65).

"Sue, I am putting together a tapestry wall in the library. This wall will be a representation of some of the stories, people and of our work together, that have been a part of the Bisset School Story since the beginning, in 1989. I want to paint the metaphors that have been themes and characters in our stories. I just want to make sure I have the main ones... rainbows, dreamcatchers, journeys, daisies, chameleons, touchstones, teddy bears, memory boxes, gifts, gems, and celebrations. Have I missed any? We are going to dedicate this wall to the first seven years of Bisset School and to our Teller of Stories." (Staff Response Journal)

Beginning of a New Day

The storied life of Bisset School was a living story, about people and learning, told by many storytellers, their voices heard through the story of school woven with trust, respect, grace and care by the Teller of Stories.

This is my story. I offer the storyteller as a way of thinking about the role of a principal. I believe that a storyteller needs to think about a myriad of complex and complicated

understandings. They need to think about the safe places to tell stories, the threads of the story that are to be told, the threads within the story and how they work together, how stories influence and touch other stories, the effect of the story on the audience, ways for the audience to believe in the story as it becomes a part of their story and finally the responsibility for the care of each story. Shared work and purpose are constructed within a learning community through the stories that the principal chooses to tell and by how the principal tells the stories. We are not always very mindful of what we say, but as storytellers, dedicated to honing a craft, we become more mindful of the stories that were told about ourselves, our staffs, our children and the communities within which we work. The stories would not be about numbers, control, or problems to be fixed, but instead the plot lines would be about people, time, place and the multiplicity of being that makes each story come alive. If the practice of administration were to become a practice of storytelling we would also have to learn to listen to the stories that are told to us, so we can shape, weave and include the pieces into the whole story of school. We don't expect to hear stories with their past, present and future hopes, dreams and knowing, so we don't know how to listen for the stories. We tell stories all of the time, but what stories are we telling? In what ways are we telling them? How are we valuing and caring for

the stories that are told to us and the ones that we tell? Principals are often given bits of information, disjointed and discrete, and asked to create a future: "this is the budget, here is the difficult teacher file, these children have problems, the heating needs to be fixed in portable 3 and the parents want computers. Change, manage, monitor, and evaluate these things and we know that the achievement on the standardized measures will make the public proud." I wonder if by thinking about the principalship as that of the teller of stories if we might create the kinds of schools where learning is a part of the fabric of life, responsive, and responsible for the lives that are entrusted to our educational ideals.

I gaze out the window and my eye catches Jimmy's grade one spruce tree. We have carefully planted his little tree here at the lake where we hope that one day his children might be. Perhaps they might play underneath the boughs of a giant blue-spruce tree and hear the story of its beginning. And I wonder about the other stories that Jimmy might one day tell about his times at the lake. I wonder about the people that might become characters in the stories that Jimmy tells...will he have a Great Aunt Enid? I think about the osprey, the loons and the beautiful sunsets. I think about this as a time in which I have been fortunate to reflect upon my story of school, Bisset School. I hear the white-throated sparrow and still can't pick her out against the now dense foliage of the bush. The seasons are changing in the dance of time as the springtime

freshness fades to the deepening green of summer. I remember a poem that the staff wrote for me as they told a story of Bisset School. "I'm the one in charge of celebrations" (Baylor, 1986, p. 2).

The Gardener

The gardener leads gently, guides with wisdom, and sensitivity
Dedicated to growth, to creating a field of beauty
Committed to the task, working tirelessly towards a dream,
a vision for the future.
Sowing seeds, waiting patiently, nurturing, tending,
while believing and understanding the growth process
Nourishing the roots that provide a strong foundation
working in harmony with nature, respecting and replenishing,
creating a fruitful space.
Preparing the flowers for the elements, the changing seasons
Acknowledging the uniqueness and need of each individual flower
Risking, exploring new methods, creating a more vibrant garden
Working behind the scenes, building a community of caregivers
Orchestrating a symphony of colors
Those travelling through the garden stand in awe,
Sensing a unique environment, appreciating the plan at work,
Celebrating the beauty.
The gentle, talented gardener's hand allows the garden to radiate it's own glory.
The gardener openly shares her wisdom, her vision

with those who observe and listen 'care'fully.

Those willing to join in the art of gardening.

(M. Donadt, June, 1996)

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